Dr. T. M. P. MAHADEVAN

THE INSIGHTS OF ADVAITA

(SPECIAL LECTURES)

UNIVERSITY OF MYSORE

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THE INSIGHTS OF ADVAITA

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

We are extremely happy to present "Insights of Advaita" to our Public in the present form.

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Prabhu Shankara
Director

PREFACE

This book contains the text of a course of three lectures delivered under the auspices of the University of Mysore. Lecture One gives an outline of the metaphysical position of Advaita Vedānta, which is that Brahman is the only Reality and that all diversity is appearance based on ignorance of this Reality. To know that such is the truth is not, however, the purpose of Advaita. Intellectual conviction must lead on to an actualization of knowledge in direct experience. This alone constitutes liberation. Hence Lectures Two and Three pass on to describe The Way to the realization of Braman and The Goal of realization, respectively. Thus the three lectures are intended to give an insight into the nature of Advaita as Philosophy and Experience.

I thank Dr K. L. Shrimali, the then Vice-Chancellor, and the authorities of the

University of Mysore for inviting me to deliver these lectures. I am indebted to the Director of 'Prasaranga', the University's publications department, for undertaking to publish these lectures.

University Centenary Building
Madras, July 1, 1970

T. M. P. Mahadevan

CONTENTS

LECTURE ONE — REALITY	...	3
LECTURE TWO — THE WAY	...	35
LECTURE THREE — THE GOAL	...	93

THE INSIGHTS OF ADVAITA

Lecture One

REALITY

Advaita is *non-dual-ism*. Reality, according to its insight, is *non-dual*, not-two. Advaita does not profess to formulate conceptually what Reality is. It is not, therefore, a system of thought, an *-ism*. It is not a school among schools of philosophy. It does not reject any view of Reality; it only seeks to transcend all views, since these are by their very nature restricted, limited, and circumscribed. The pluralisms, theistic or otherwise, imagine that they are opposed to Advaita. But Advaita is not opposed to any of the partial views of Reality. An illustrious predecessor of Śaṅkara, Gauḍapāda, makes this clear when he says:

"The dualists (i.e. pluralists) are conclusively firm in regard to the status of their respective opinions. They are in conflict

with one another. But, Advaita is in no conflict with them.

"Advaita, verily, is the supreme truth; dvaita is a variant thereof. For the dualists, there is duality either way (i.e. both in the Absolute and in the phenomenal manifold). With that (duality) this (non-duality) is not in conflict". [1]

Commenting on these verses of Gauḍapāda, Śaṅkara observes:

"Since the philosophy of the non-dual Self has been established through scripture and reasoning, it is the true philosophy; since the rest are external thereto, they are non-true philosophies. Also, the philosophy of the dualists is non-true because it gives room for defects such as attachment and aversion. How? The dualists who follow the philosophies of Kapila (Sāṅkhya), Kaṇāda (Vaiśeṣika), Buddha (Buddhism), Ārhata (Jainism), etc., hold firmly to their respective convictions thus 'The supreme truth is thus and thus alone, not otherwise'; therefore, they become attached to their own schools and hate the others which they consider to be

[1] *Māṇḍūkya-kārikā*, iii, 17–18.

opposed to them; thus they are endowed with attachment and aversion, and are in mutual conflict on account of their respective convictions. With those mutually conflicting philosophies, our view of the oneness of Self which is in accordance with the teachings of the Veda is not in conflict because it is not exclusive of any of those schools, even as one's own hands and feet are not in conflict (with oneself)."

"Non-duality is the supreme truth; this being so, duality, i.e. plurality, is a variant of that non-duality, viz. its effect; for there are the scriptural texts 'One only, without a second,' 'It brought forth light,' etc.; and also for the reason that in *yogic* trance, swoon, or sleep, where one's mind does not function, that (duality) is non-existent. Therefore, duality is said to be a variant of that (non-duality). To the dualists, however, both in the absolute sense and in the non-absolute sense, there is only duality. If for them, who are deluded, there is perception of duality, for us who are not deluded there is the perception of non-duality. Thus, for this reason, our view is not in conflict with their views.....

"As one who is mounted on a spirited elephant does not drive it against a lunatic who stands on the ground and shouts, 'Drive your elephant against me who also am seated on an elephant,' because he (the former) has no notion of opposition, even so (is the case with the non-dualist). Thus, in truth, the knower of *Brahman* is the very self of the dualists. For this reason, our view is not in conflict with theirs."[1]

It is a basic insight of Advaita, whereupon all other insights follow, that the plenary truth is not in conflict with the partial perspectives. While the pluralistic world-views are in conflict with one another, Advaita is not opposed to any of them. It recognizes that there is truth in each of them, but only that truth is not the whole. Hostility arises out of partial vision. When the whole truth is known, there could be no hostility.[2]

The roots of the Advaita insight into the nature of Reality as the Whole, as the

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[1] See T. M. P. Mahadevn, *Readings from Śaṅkara* (Part Two) (Ganesh & Co. Madras, 1961), pp. 86–89.

[2] See T. M. P. Mahadevan, *Gauḍapāda: A Study in Early Advaita* (University of Madras, 3rd Edn. 1960), p. 247.

nondual Spirit, are to be traced to the Vedic *mantras* and the teachings of the Upaniṣads.

In some hymns of the *Ṛg-veda* Reality is referred to in the neuter gender, and its non-duality is taught. Even where the masculine gender is employed, it is clear that no anthropomorphism is meant. The *Puruṣasūkta* gives a description of the *Puruṣa* who is immanent as well as transcendent: "Thousand-headed was Puruṣa, thousand-eyed, thousand-footed. He having covered the earth on all sides, extended beyond it the length of ten fingers. Puruṣa is this all,—all that has been and that will be. And he is the lord of immortality, which he grows beyond through food. Such is his greatness, and more than that is Puruṣa. A fourth of him is all beings, three-fourths of him are what is immortal in Heaven." [1] In one striking verse the gods are characterized as but different names for one and the same reality.

'They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa,
Agni and he is heavenly nobly-winged
Garutman. To what is one, sages

[1] X. 90. 1–3; Macdonell, *Vedic Reader*. pp. 195–97.

give many a title ; they call it Agni, Yama, Mātariśvan.'[1]

It is significant that, in the second half of this verse, the one reality is called 'It,' neither male nor female. The well-known *Nāsadīya* hymn which has been praised as containing 'the flower of Indian thought' speaks of the one that was calm and self-sustained before creation. In this hymn may be discerned the quintessence of non-dualism. All things are traced to one principle. Opposites like being and non-being, life and death, night and day, are shown to be the self-unfoldment of this One. How from the distinctionless principle which is 'neither aught nor nought' the world of opposites and distinctions arose no one can tell. 'That one' *(tad ekam)* which the hymn does not name is the ground of the universe. Because it is devoid of differences, it is referred to as a void. It is *śūnya* as it were. The world-process is an appearance in and of it. How the one appears as the many is a mystery. Thus we may note in the *Nāsadīya* hymn the foundations of Advaita—the doctrine that ultimate reality

[1] I. 164. 46 ; Griffith, *Hymns the of Ṛg-veda*, Vol. I, p. 292.

is one and that the world is an appearance, a result of *māyā*.

The Advaita that is incipient in the Vedic hymns becomes pronounced in the Upaniṣads. In fact, it is the Upaniṣads that constitute Vedānta. As a typical instance of the Upaniṣadic teaching about the non-dual Reality, I may here refer to the discourses of Yājñavalkya recorded in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. A scholar without par, skilled in the art of philosophical debate, Yājñavalkya had as his patron and pupil King Janaka. One of his two wives, Maitreyī, was a meet companion of this master of metaphysics; and she is responsible for eliciting from her lord some rare passages declaring the nature of the Self.

In II, iv, is recorded Yājñavalkya's teaching to Maitreyī. At the end of a full and rich life as a house-holder the great philosopher informed his younger wife Maitreyī that he had decided to renounce the world and that he wished to partition his properties between her and Kātyayanī. Maitreyī was not sorry for her husband's decision to renounce; but only she did not relish the idea of enjoying his wealth after him. Of what use is wealth to one who seeks real

happiness? She asked Yājñavalkya: "Sir, if this entire earth filled with wealth were mine, would I become immortal by that?" Yājñavalkya confessed that there was no hope of immortality through wealth. Then Maitreyī said: "What shall I do with that through which I cannot become immortal? Tell me, Sir, what you know." The sage, in response, gave her the highest teaching about the Self. Nothing is dear for its own sake. The husband is dear to the wife not for the sake of the husband but for the sake of the self. The same is true of all other things. The self is dearer than the son, as the Upaniṣad declares in another context, dearer than wealth, dearer than everything else and is innermost (I, iv, 8). It is the self that should be seen, heard, thought about and meditated on. Since the self is all, there can be nothing left unknown, after the self has been known. Self-knowledge, however, is not to be confused with objective knowledge. The self cannot be known as objects are known. "Where there is duality as it were, there one knows another. Where indeed for one everything has become the self, there through whom and whom is one to know? Him through whom one knows all

this, through whom one is to know? Lo, through whom is one to know the knower?" The essence of Yājñavalkya's teaching to Maitreyī is that the self is non-dual, of the nature of happiness and knowledge.

There is a description of a full-dress philosophical debate with Yājñavalkya as the central figure at King Janaka's court in Chapter III. Janaka once performed a sacrifice to which he had invited learned men from far and near. Desiring to know as to who among them was the most learned, he caused a thousand cows to be brought to the court with ten pieces of gold tied to the horns of each, and addressed the gathering thus: "O venerable Brahmins, whoever among you is the best learned in the lore of Brahman may lead these cows home." Yājñavalkya who was in the assembly rose up and asked a pupil of his to lead the cows to his house. But the other learned men would not let Yājñavalkya's claim go unchallenged. They put him several test-questions, some of them bearing on ritual and the others on metaphysics. One of the scholars, Uṣasta by name, asked Yājñavalkya to explain the nature of Brahman which is immediate and direct,

and the self within all. Yājñavalkya replied that the Brahman-self which is within all is the life of life. When pressed to be more definite, he said, "You cannot see the seer of seeing. You cannot know the knower of knowing. This is the self of yours which is within all. Whatever is other than this is mutable." Another and by far the most formidable examiner of Yājñavalkya was a woman, Gārgī. She started by asking about the support of all things. Yājñavalkya in a series of replies traced all things to deeper and deeper foundations and went as far as words could go. Then Uddālaka questioned him about the inner ruler of all beings. In a set of beautiful passages Yājñavalkya explained that the principle that lies behind all things, cosmic as well as individual, the principle which these do not know but which controls them from within is the inner ruler; and this ruler, said Yājñavalkya, is your own immortal self. Gārgī stood up again and pursued her old question about the final support of things. "Across what is that woven warp and woof," she asked, "that which is above the sky, that which is beneath the earth, that which is between these two, that which is past, present, and future?'

Yājñavalkya replied: "It is woven across space." But across what is space woven warp woof? The final answer given by the sage was that the Immutable across which space is woven can be indicated only by negative terms. Empirical categories like magnitude, colour, etc., are inapplicable to it. It is not an object of experience, nor even the subject of experience. "Not that does anything eat; nor does that eat anything." The Immutable is not a void, an airy nothing. It is the basis of all things. Under its mighty rule the planets keep to their places, seasons change, time is regulated and rivers flow along fixed courses. It cannot be seen, for it is the seer, or rather sight. Similarly, it cannot be heard, thought, or known. Other than it there is no seer, thinker or knower. The Immutable is the support of all-that-is, even of ether. Gārgī was fully satisfied with Yājñavalkya's teaching, and thoroughly convinced of his superior wisdom, addressed the assembly saying, "Never shall any of you beat him in rendering an account of Brahman." Not heeding these words, one Sākalya cross-examined him further. In the course of his replies, Yājñavalkya said: "The self is to be described as 'not this, not this'. It

is imperceptible, for it is never perceived; undecaying, for it never decays; unattached, for it is never attached; unfettered—it never feels pain, and never suffers injury."

The same teaching is repeated by Yājñavalkya to Janaka on a subsequent occasion. The royal patron had heard from several scholars partial truths about Brahman. One of them had declared that speech was Brahman; another had identified Brahman with the vital force; a third had said, the eye is Brahman; a fourth, ear; a fifth, mind; a sixth, heart. Yājñavalkya characterized these views as inadequate and Brahman as thus identifed as 'but one-footed' *(eka-pād)*. Then he gave Janaka what he considered to be the true conception of Brahman. "The self is not this, not this", he said. All determination is limitation. The Self is infinite. There are no limits to it. Therefore it cannot be characterized as this or as that.

At another meeting with Janaka, Yājñavalkya discoursed again on Brahman and explained the nature of transmigration. The king started by asking the sage about that which serves as the light *(jyotis)* for man. The sun, the moon, fire, and speech are lights,

no doubt. But these are not self-luminous, since they shine by the light of the self. The self is the inner light, the light that never was on sea or land. It is constant and unchanging through the changing states of waking and dream. It thinks, as it were, moves as it were *(dhyāyatīva, lolāyatīva)*. But in truth, it neither thinks nor moves. In dream there are not the external objects, and the self's inherent luminosity is realized. Waking (*buddhānta*) and dream *(svapnānta)* do not alter the nature of the self which is unattached *(asaṅga)*. In sleep there are neither desires nor dreams; the self returns to itself, as it were; it is free from evil and is fearless. In this state a father becomes non-father, a mother non-mother, the worlds non-worlds, the gods non-gods, and the Veda non-Veda. All distinctions vanish, but consciousness remains; for consciousness which is the self can never be lost; it is indestructible. But there is nothing which it can see, for there is no other than it. Where there is something else, as it were, there one may see something, one may smell something, one may taste something, one may hear something, one may think something, one may touch something, or one may know something.

The self, however, is one without a second *(advaita)*; it is infinite bliss. This self is Brahman *(ayam ātmā brahma)*. One who knows thus realizes Brahman here and now. If one knows the self as 'I am this,' then what need is there for suffering in the wake of the body? There is no transmigration for one who sees unity; whereas one who sees difference, as it were, goes from death to death. In the self there is no difference whatsoever. The great unborn self is the immortal Brahman, without decay, death and fear.

It should be evident from the teachings of Yājñavalkya that he is an advocate of the acosmic view. The self, according to him, is the central reality. The pluralistic universe is an illusory appearance, for there is no plurality, in truth. The travails of transmigration are not for one who realizes the non-duality of the self. The self is Brahman. It is the seat of supreme happiness. It is light and love; it is the life of life. It is not an object of experience; it is experience *per se*. Any positive affirmation regarding the self should not be understood literally. It is not possible to determine its nature as this or as that. All contradictions vanish when the self is realized.

This, in short, is Yājñavalkya's teaching. And, this is the substantial teaching of the Upaniṣads in general.

It was on the foundations of the Upaniṣads that Śaṅkara built the grand edifice of Advaita. At a time when false doctrines were misguiding the generality of people, and orthodoxy had nothing better to offer to counteract the atheism of the heterodox than a barren and outmoded ritualism, Śaṅkara recaptured the heights of the Upaniṣadic philosophy and brought from there for the benefit of humanity the waters of eternal life. Great as was his logical skill, it was not logic alone that crowned his mission with success, but a conviction and authority born of living experience. In the only oblique reference that he makes to himself in all his writings — and this occurs towards the end of the *Sūtra-bhāṣya* he observes, "What right has any other person to deny the heart-felt experience of one as possessing Brahman-knowledge while being in a body?"[1]

It was out of his own self-evidencing plenary experience that Śaṅkara poured forth

[1] *kathaṁ hi ekasya svahṛdayapratyayaṁ brahmavedanaṁ dehadhāraṇaṁ ca apareṇa pratikṣeptum śakyeta?*

his philosophy which bears the name 'Advaita'. He mightily influenced the people of his time—even the tallest of them — and spread over the country a net-work of organizations to serve as its spiritual guide-posts. His philosophy has come to be regarded not only here in India but even abroad as 'one of the most valuable products of the genius of mankind in its researches of the eternal truth.' And, as a great contemporary Indian philosopher rightly remarks, 'Even those who do not agree with his general attitude to life will not be reluctant to allow him a place among the immortals.'

In the history of Indian philosophy the place of Śaṅkara is as assured as it is high. Although he disclaimed originality, he wrought a revolution in the minds of men, the salutary effects of which can be felt even today. He set a model in thinking and exposition which subsequent philosophers in India have striven to follow. A great metaphysician describes Śaṅkara's style of writing as *prasannagambhīra*, lucid and deep. His works are characterized by penetrating insight and analytical skill. The metaphysics of the Absolute which he taught is, it is true, difficult to

understand. Any attempt to expound it would necessarily involve expression of obscurity. But Śaṅkara's manner of exposition does not present us with the usual but unnecessary additional difficulty which is obscurity of expression. He wrote stupendous works, both in prose and verse; and all of them are marked by depth of thought and lucidity of language. Among his major works are the great commentaries on what are known as the three canons of Vedānta, viz., the principal *Upaṇiṣads*, the *Bhagavad-gītā*, and the *Brahma-sūtra*, and such independent manuals as the *Upadeśasāhasrī* and the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*.

The quintessence of the philosophy of Śaṅkara is stated by himself in a half-verse thus: 'The Absolute Spirit is the reality; the world of appearance is illusory; the so-called individual soul is the Absolute itself, and no other.'[1]

The Upaniṣadic terms 'Brahman' and 'Ātman' indicate the highest reality which is non-dual. As the nature of the Absolute cannot be defined in terms of any category, the

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[1] *brahma satyaṁ jagan mithyā*
jīvo brahmaiva nā' parah

Upaniṣads refer to it as 'not this, not this' (*neti neti*). This does not mean, however, that the Absolute is a night of nothingness, a contentless void. It is the plenary being, the sole reality. In some texts of the *Upaniṣads*, positive expressions are also employed with reference to Brahman — terms like *satya*, *jñāna*, and *ānanda*, existence, consciousness, and bliss. But these too are designed for making us understand the Real by telling us what it is not, viz., that it is not non-being, not what is inert, and not that which is related to sorrow. To define a thing is to limit it, to finitize it The infinite and the unlimited cannot be characterized in terms of finite categories. Brahman is *nirguṇa*, without characteristics. Even to say that it is one is not strictly true; for the category of number is inapplicable to the Absolute. That is why Śaṅkara calls his philosophy 'Advaita'.

It is true that there are in the Upaniṣads passages which characterize Brahman as the cause of the world, and as the home of all auspicious qualities. But how are we to reconcile the two views — the view of Brahman as the Absolute, without characteristics, and the view which characterizes it as the world-ground? For solving this problem, Śaṅkara

postulates two standpoints : the absolute (*pāramārthika*) and the relative (*vyāvahārika*). The supreme truth is that Brahman is non-dual and relationless It alone is ; there is nothing real besides it. But from our standpoint, which is the empirical, relative standpoint, Brahman appears as God, the cause of the world. There is no real causation ; the world is but an illusory appearance in Brahman, even as the snake is in the rope. This doctrine is known as *vivarta-vāda* (the theory of phenomenal appearance) which is to be distinguished from its rival, *pariṇāma-vāda* (the theory of transformation).

Brahman the ultimate Reality, as we have seen, is unconditioned, without attributes, without qualifications. But it is the same Reality that is called God when viewed in relation to the empirical world and the empirical souls. Brahman is the same, as *nirguṇa* (attributeless) and as *saguṇa* (with attributes). There are not two Brahmans, as wrongly alleged by some critics. Even when God is referred to as the lower (*apara*) Brahman, what is meant is not that Brahman has become lower in status as God, but that God is Brahman looked at from the lower level of

relative experience. These are two forms (*dvirūpa*) of Brahman and not two Brahmans: Brahman as-it-is-in-itself, and Brahman as-it-is-in-relation-to-the-world. The former is the unconditioned Brahman; the latter is Brahman as conditioned by nomenclature, configuration, and change.

God, thus, is the conditioned Brahman; the conditioning principle is called *māyā*. As *māyā* is not a reality alongside or apart from Brahman, it does not make for the introduction of any real duality. All that Godhead requires for its status is assumed duality, and not real duality. Ether is spoken of as ether-at-large in relation to pot-ether, etc.; in and for itself, there is no difference. Similarly, God is said to possess omniscience, omnipotence, etc., as distinguished from the soul which is parviscient, with limited power, etc. In Itself, Godhead knows no distinctions, and cannot be categorized. According to one version of the reflection-theory (*pratibiṁbavāda*), it is to be admitted, God is described as the reflection of Brahman in *māyā*. But, it should be remembered that, according to this view, the reflection is identical with the prototype. The other version of the reflection-theory which is more

generally accepted compares God to the prototype-face, and the souls alone to reflections of the face in mirrors. In any case, God, in Advaita, is not a phantom-creation or an ideal construction of the individual's mind The idea of God is not to be brushed aside as an irrelevant postulation or as an impossible and inconsistent concept. The place of God in Advaita is neither pernicious nor precarious; on the contrary, the concept is quite pertinent to, and precious for, Advaita-experience.

If the soul and God are one, where is the place for God in Advaita? it may be asked. The reply is simple. Even in the identity statements 'That thou art', 'I am Brahman', etc., it is not identity of the soul with God that is taught. It is precisely because there could be no identity between the primary meanings of the two words in each statement, viz., 'the individual soul' and 'God', that recourse is had to the secondary implication. What these statements teach is not that the soul and God are one, but that the secondary meaning of the two words is the same, viz., the unconditioned Self. What Advaita tells us is that the Ātman is Brahman, and that not jīva (soul) is Īśvara (God). There is a text of

the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* which says with reference to the self of the state of deep sleep: 'This is the lord of all, this is the knower of all, this is the inner ruler of all. This is the source of all, the origin and end, indeed, of beings'. The meaning of this text is not that the empirical jīva is identical with Īśvara; the text should be regarded as an eulogy of Prājña, the self in the state of sleep where there is no duality whatsoever. The passage may also be taken as indicating the correlation between the individual form of the Self and its cosmic form. There are certain meditations in which the aspirant is asked to identify himself with the Deity: the highest phase in the scale of meditation assumes the form, 'I am Brahman'. But, here, what is required is assumed or superimposed identification, and not real identity. When one has to speak of, or do with, the soul *and* God, one has to recognize the distinction between the two. Advaita does not seek to abolish the distinction. If God be compared to the sea and the soul to its wave, it would be proper to say that the soul is a property of God and not that God is a property of the soul, even as it would be to say that the wave belongs to the sea and not that

the sea belongs to the wave. It has been declared that the duality assumed for the sake of devotion is more beautiful than even non-duality *(bhaktyarthaṁ kalpitaṁ dvaitam advaitād-api sundaram)*.

The place of God in Advaita may be understood from the standpoints of both metaphysics and axiology. God is to be regarded as the ground of the universe, and as the goal of meditation. In relation to the world, God is the basic Existence; in relation to the soul, He is the supreme Value.

God is not *a* cause among causes producing the world; He is the whole and the sole cause. The view of an Artificer—God manufacturing things out of extraneous matter—is not favoured by Advaita. God is both the material and efficient cause of the world. Since the idea of cause is associated with the concept of time, it is probably better to consider God to be the ultimate *ground* of things. Godhead or Brahman is that from which beings arise, in which they reside after arising, and into which they disappear at the end. When one contemplates the nature and constitution of the universe, one is struck with wonder. The universe is differentiated by

names and forms; it includes many agents and enjoyers; its constituents are regulated in respect of place, time, cause, action and fruit; the design which it reveals cannot be even conceived by the mind. For such an infinitely ordered and variegated universe, no other cause or ground could be postulated than the omniscient and omnipotent God. Neither primal Nature, nor a set of atoms, nor non-existence, nor the individual souls are equal to the task of the world-projection. God alone can serve as the adequate ground. The argument which has now been advanced and other similar arguments should not be regarded as proofs for the existenee of God. God is not the end-result of syllogistic reasoning. The arguments are useful only as helps that render intelligible the intuitively discerned and scripturally declared truth.

God is not only the world-ground but also the moral governor. The law of *karma* which operates in the moral realm has God for its guide. If the souls reap the consequences of their actions, good for good, and ill for ill, it is because of God's dispensation expressed in the form of the *kārmic* law. To the Mīmāṁsaka's contention that *karma* can and

does function by itself, the Vedāntin's reply is that *karma* which is inert does require an intelligent controller for its operation. No finite intelligent agent can be the controller of *karma*. In fact, the agent-souls are the victims of *karma*; although this statement should not be taken to mean that the souls are playthings in the hands of Fate. Each soul certainly deserves the fruits of its own deeds. *Karma* is the principle of justice that matches deserts with deeds. And, the dispenser of justice, the inner immortal ruler, is God. This is, however, not the same as saying that God is connected with the law in a merely administrative capacity of Paymaster. He is both the Law-Giver and the Law. He resides within the souls and rules them. His rulership has for its ultimate aim the liberation of souls. The world which He has projected out of Himself through *māyā* is the vale of soul-making.

Māyā is the principle that makes for the phenomenal appearance of the world. It has significance only from the relative (*vyāvahārika*) standpoint, and not from the standpoint of the Absolute *(pāramārthika)*. The supreme truth is that *māyā* is that which *(yā)*

is not *(mā)*. But from our point of view, *māyā* appears as an inscrutable power of God that veils the true and projects the untrue. The power of veiling is termed *āvaraṇa*, and that of projecting *vikṣepa*. If one were to ask : is *māyā* real or not?, the only answer is : it is neither real nor unreal. Because the world of plurality appears, *māyā* is not unreal ; because *māyā* is sublated by the knowledge of the non-dual self, it is not real. It cannot be both real and unreal. Therefore it is indeterminable*(anirvacanīya)*. Any inquiry into *māyā* is not to make the concept intelligible, but to enable one to go beyond it. When one has gone beyond, there remains no problem to be solved.

Any attempt to explain creation is bound to fail. On the phenomenal level, the intellect seeks to inquire into the nature of the world, and does not succeed in its attempt. When the final intuition of the Absolute is gained, it will be realized that the world was never created, that it is an illusory appearance. *Brahman* or *Ātman* alone is : the world is a misreading thereof, even as the illusory snake is seen in the rope. The texts of the Upaniṣads which speak of creation have no purport

of their own. They are to be interpreted figuratively. They serve to introduce the subject of non-duality.

The meaning of the *Aitareya Upaniṣad* text about creation, for instance, is that even the gods are afflicted with hunger and thirst. And so, attaining identity with them cannot be the final goal. Wherever there is duality, there will be pain and misery. It is only the non-dual Spirit that is absolute bliss.

We have so far been concerned with the first two aspects of Advaita: that Brahman is the non-dual reality, and that the world of plurality is illusory appearance. We shall now turn to the third aspect, i.e. that the so-called individual soul is no other than Brahman. The individual soul is *jīva*, the conscious living being. There are several grades of conscious beings—as the phrase goes—from grass to Brahmā (the first to be created). These may be grouped under three heads, sub-human, human, and super-human. The group into which a soul is born is determined by the soul's past *karma*. The soul is born as an animal if there is an excess of demerit, as a god if there is an excess of merit, and as a human being if there is a balance

between merit and demerit. So far as instinctive behaviour is concerned, man is not different from the animal. A cow, for instance, approaches the man who goes towards it with fresh grass in his extended hands, and runs away from him who runs after it with a club held aloft. Exactly similar is the behaviour of men in parallel situations.

Is not man, then, superior to the animal? Wherein lies his excellence? Explaining a text of the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* which speaks about the evolution of man from matter, Śaṅkara observes as follows: 'When all things without distinction are modifications of matter *(annarasa)* and lineal descendants of Brahman, why should man alone be singled out here? The reason is that he is the principal. Why is he the principal? Because he has the eligibility for action and knowledge'.[1] In this context Śaṅkara quotes also a passage from the *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* which runs thus: The *Ātman* is expanded only in man. He, indeed, is most endowed with intelligence. He gives expression to what is known. He sees what is known. He knows what is to come. He

[1] *Taittirīya-upaniṣad-bhāṣya*, Mem. Edn., Vol. 6., p. 71.

knows the visible and the invisible worlds. He perceives the immortal through the mortal. Thus is he endowed. But with the other animals, eating and drinking alone constitute the sphere of their knowledge'. [1]

In a sense, man occupies a position which is even more advantageous than that of the gods. For the status of the gods only provides the soul with the enjoyment of merit acquired in previous human lives, even as the animal state is meant for paying for past demerit. It is as a human being that the soul acts and enjoys, enjoys and acts, and also has the competence to break through this vicious circle and gain the highest human goal which is release *(mokṣa)*.

According to Vedānta, the soul is not created ; only its empirical outfit consisting of body and mind is created. The body-mind complex and its cause, nescience (*avidyā*), constitute the soul's *saṁsāra* (transmigratory life). Nescience is the causal body (*kāraṇa-śarīra*) of the soul. The causal body is also known as the sheath of bliss *(ānandamaya-kośa)*. The subtle body is composed of three sheaths : the sheath

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[1] *Aitareya Āraṇyaka*, III, ii. 3.

of intellect *(vijñānamaya-kośa)*, the sheath of mind (*manomaya-kośa*), and the sheath of breath *(prāṇamaya–kośa)*. The physical body is the sheath of food, i.e., matter *(annamaya-kośa)*. What happens at death is only a change of the physical body. The *Bhagavad-gītā* compares this to the change of garment. Just as a person discards a set of old clothes and puts on a new set, even so the soul leaves a worn-out body and takes on a fresh one.[1] The subtle body, however, continues with incidental alterations, and also the causal body, till the onset of release.

Man's experience is distinguishable into three states: waking *(jāgrat)*, dream *(svapna)*, and sleep *(suṣupti)*. In the state of waking, man experiences the external world of things. In dream, he creates an inner world of images and imagines that he is a denizen thereof. In sleep, the sense of plurality is lost and there is awareness without awareness of *anything*. Of the three states, waking is unique in the sense that it is only as located here that man can know that he is bound by *avidyā* (nescience), strive for and eventually gain

[1] *Gītā* ii, 22.

mokṣa (release). We saw above that the status of man is a privileged one. Similarly, the state of waking has a vantage-point. Genuine philosophical inquiry leading to illumination is made possible here. But the inquiry should not be restricted to the implications of the waking world alone, for waking is only a segment of experience. And, inquiry in order to be fruitful must take into account the total experience. It is thus that the inquiry into the three states becomes supremely important in Advaita-Vedānta. The result of this inquiry is that the Self is of the nature of pure consciousness, unaffected by the accidents such as the body, the mind, and the world, which change and pass. In the language of the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* and the *kārikā* of Gauḍapāda, the true Self is *caturtha* or *turīya* (the fourth), the transcendent reality. It is the 'fourth' not in addition to or as different from its appearance in waking, dream, and sleep. It is the basic reality of the appearances, both individual and collective.

It does not take much time to set forth the truth of Advaita or to understand it intellectually. But long discipline and education are necessary in the case of the average

man before he can intuitively realize that truth.

What are the discipline and the education that are necessary for realizing the truth, we shall consider in the second lecture.

Lecture two

THE WAY

It is on account of nescience, ignorance, that the individual soul imagines itself to be limited, to be transmigrating from one life to another, to be different from the ultimate Reality, Brahman. We also saw that it is the prerogative of man to get rid of nescience and realize the truth of non-duality. The Advaita insight into the nature of the way and the goal will become intelligible if we remember that nescience is the root cause of bondage. It is because of nescience that the self and the not-self are wrongly identified with each other, and the characteristics of the one are superimposed on the other.

The concept of superimposition is so vital to Advaita that Śaṅkara prefaces his commentary on the *Brahma-sūtra* with a discourse on the concept *(adhyāsabhāṣya)*. One cannot

possibly explain the mutual superimposition of the self and the not-self, for they are opposed to each other like light and darkness. That is why superimposition (*adhyāsa*) is an illusion *(mithyā)*, although it is a fact. Empirical usage is founded on this illusion. It is as governed thereby that man's nature functions the way it does. Man fails to distinguish the self and the not-self, mistakes the characteristics of the one for those of the other, couples the real and the non-real, and indulges in such empirical usage as 'I am this,' and 'This is mine.' This is the result of superimposition. The definition of superimposition is this: "the appearance elsewhere, with a nature like to that of recollection, of what was seen before."[1] The essence of the definition is the appearance of one thing as having the attributes of another. Examples will make this clear: nacre appears as if silver; the moon though one appears as if having a second: *i.e.* silverness is superimposed on nacre; being double is superimposed on the single moon. Similarly, on the Self are superimposed the characteristics

[1] *Sūtra-bhāṣya: smṛti-rūpah paratra pūrvadṛṣṭāvabhāsah.*

of the not-self. This superimposition is called nescience *(avidyā)*. Knowledge *(vidyā)*, on the contrary, is the determination of the true nature of the Self.

Since nescience is the cause of bondage, it should be admitted, says Advaita, that knowledge is the means to release. Brahman which is to be realized—and this is release—is not the object of an act. Brahman is ever existent; it does not depend on human activity.[1] This is the position of Advaita. The Upaniṣads teach *jñāna* as the means to release, and not action.

This the Mīmāṁsaka does not accept. The Mīmāṁsā view is that the entire Veda has ritual action (*karma*) for its purport. The aim of the Veda is to prescribe certain actions, and prohibit certain others. Injuction or command *(codanā)* is the main character of the Vedic texts. The end that is achieved through the performance of the acts enjoined by the Veda is prosperity (*abhyudaya*) here and in a hereafter. But even release *(niḥśreyasa, mokṣa)* is to be gained through the Vedic rites alone. It is true that release

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[1] *Sūtra-bhāṣya:* I, i, 1. *bhūtaṁ brahma jijñāsyaṁ nityavṛttatvān – na puruṣavyāpāra-tantram.*

implies freedom from *karma*, both in the sense of action and in the sense of the fruit of action consisting in merit *(puṇya)* and demerit *(pāpa)*. This, however, is to be achieved by performing the duties ordained in the Veda. There are various types of acts taught in the Veda. The optional rites *(kāmya-karma)* are those which one performs for gaining finite ends including heaven *(svarga)*. The prohibited acts *(pratiṣiddha-karma)* are those which one must refrain from doing, as their performance would result in the acquisition of demerit with its evil consequences of suffering and hell. The obligatory *(nitya)* and occasioned *(naimittika)* rites are those which one ought to perform, as their non-performance would mean demerit. Now, the seeker after release should keep away from the optional rites and prohibited deeds; thereby he does not acquire fresh merit and demerit. He should perform, as long as he lives, the obligatory and occasioned rites; thus he avoids demerit. And when the present body falls on the exhaustion of the *karma* of which it is an effect, one attains release. Thus, according to the Mīmāṁsaka, *karma* is the sole means to *mokṣa*. Like prosperity, he

argues, release is what-is-to-be-accomplished ; and what - is - to - be - accomplished requires action for its accomplishment. True, there are non-injunctive texts in the Veda ; and the Vedānta texts such as 'That thou art' are non-injunctive. But those texts have no independent purport ; they should be treated as eulogistic or condemnatory passages *(arthavāda)*, and interpreted in association with an injunction. For instance, the Upaniṣad texts about the self or Brahman should be regarded as eulogies of the eligible person for a sacrifice.

The substance of the Advaitin's reply to the Mīmāṁsaka is as follows : The eligibility for the Vedānta study is quite different from that for the *karmakāṇḍa* ; the fruit also is different. It is he who has renounced all attachment to works that is eligible to study the Vedānta texts and profiit thereby. The fruit of *karma* is prosperity which is what-is-to-be-accomplished and impermanent. The goal of *Vedānta* as taught in the Upaniṣads is release *(mokṣa)* which is not what-is-accomplished, but is eternal. It is only figuratively stated that release is to be achieved. In truth, however, release is the eternal nature of the

self. What stands in the way of realizing this is ignorance or nescience *(ajñāna, āvidyā)*. When ignorance is removed through knowledge *(jñāna)*, there is release. This is not a new acquisition; it is the realization of what eternally is. Anything that is caused by action is bound to perish. Through action one of four results may be obtained: origination, attainment, purification, and modification. Release is different from these. The self which is of the nature of release is not what is originated, attained, purified, or modified. The Mīmāṁsaka claims that release can be gained by avoiding the optional and prohibited deeds and by performing the obligatory and occasioned rites. Any performance must lead to some positive result; so the obligatory and occasioned rites must yield their fruit which, it must be admitted, is merit. Even if we ignore this fact, the discipline recommended by the Mīmāṁsaka can at best make us free from *karma*. But *karma* is the effect of nescience; and with the destruction of the effect, the cause is not destroyed. What can destroy nescience is knowledge alone, and not works. As for what was said that the Vedānta texts have no purport of their own,

and should be treated as *arthavāda*, that is not sound. The Vedānta texts have their own fruit—and that the highest, i.e. release. While *svarga* which is the ultimate fruit of ritual is an unseen one *(adṛṣṭa)*, the goal of Vedānta is a seen (*dṛṣṭa*) fruit which can be enjoyed even here. So, the Upaniṣad texts cannot be regarded as eulogistic statements. They are capable of causing the realisation of the highest goal which is *mokṣa*. Here, there is no need for an injunction of *karma*. The merit of the Upaniṣads is that they do not prescribe any action. Not only is action futile with reference to release, but also it will be the cause of evil, in so far as it will create obstacles in the way of release. So, one who seeks release should renounce all action and adopt the way of knowledge.

Some Vedāntins sponsor what is known as *samuccayavāda*. Their view is that release is to be attained through a combination of works and knowledge. Here, the term 'knowledge' does not mean the knowledge of ritual and its accessories; this kind of knowledge must necessarily be combined with ritual. But 'knowledge' here means knowledge of Ātman or Brahman — that which is

the topic of the Upaniṣads. The *samuccaya-vādin* holds that it is only by performing the Vedic sacrifices and by studying the Vedānta that release can be gained. According to one school of *samuccayavāda* known as *prapañcavilaya-vāda*, *karma* becomes auxiliary for *jñāna* through effecting the resolution of the world. For instance, when one performs the *jyotiṣṭoma* sacrifice as enjoined by the Vedic text 'He who desires heaven should perform the *jyotiṣṭoma* sacrifice', the notion that the body is the self gets resolved. Thus, all the injunctions of the Veda are for making one eligible for self-knowledge through the resolution of actions, etc, constituting the world. Another school of *samuccaya-vāda* called *kāmavilaya-* or *kāmadhvaṁsa-vāda* would explain the usefulness of *karma* thus: *Karma* is auxiliary to *jñāna* by resolving desires through enjoyment. The Vedic injunctions prompt a man to perform the appropriate rituals. As a result of this performance he enjoys the fruits that are the ends of those rituals. By thus enjoying, the desire for such enjoyment is resolved; and the man becomes fit for the path of *jñāna*.

The Advitin's view is that there can be

no combination of *karma* and *jñāna,* as means to release. The reason is that the content and fruit of the one are different from those of the other. The self which is the content of *jñāna* is one, independent, and eternal, whereas actions that constitute the theme of the *karma-kāṇḍa* are many, dependent on causal correlates, and perishing. The fruit of knowledge is release, while the enjoyments that actions yield confirm the soul all the more in *saṁsāra.* Even Veda-ordained rituals cannot help in the manner conceived by the *prapañca-vilaya-vādins* and the *kāmavilaya-vādins.* Nowhere in the Veda is the resolution of the world or of desires taught as the fruit of *karma.* Resolution which is of the nature of non-existence cannot be the fruit of action. Moreover, desire is not removed through enjoyment ; on the contrary, it increases.

The *niyoga-vādin* is one who believes that the aim of the Veda is to teach what-is-to-be-done *(niyoga,kārya),* and not an existent entity such as the self or Brahman. The assertive statements of the Veda, whether in the *karma-kāṇḍa* or in the *jñāna-kāṇḍa,* are not of primary importance ; what are primary are the injunctive texts. Among *niyogavādins,*

some are Mīmāṁsakas and the others are Vedāntins. According to the former, the injunctive texts of the *karma-kāṇḍa* which prescribe the performance of sacrifices are of primary import. According to the latter, the injunctions that are to be found in the Upanisads, such as those relating to meditation, etc., are of supreme significance.

The *niyoga-vādin*, especially the Prābhākara, has a special theory of language. Words, whether secular or sacred, cannot function without *niyoga*. Let us analyse, for instance, how a beginner, say a child, learns the meaning of words. He observes a superior elder, say his grandfather, issue commands to an intermediate elder, say his father. The grandfather gives such orders as 'Bring the cow', 'Tie the cow', 'Bring the horse', etc. The father executes each time the appropriate act. The child hears the words and sees the acts that follow them. By a process of insertion and elimination he understands the meaning of the words 'bring', 'tie', 'cow', 'horse', etc. Thus, it is only as associated with commands that words become meaningful. Assertive statements are auxiliary to injunctive sentences. In an injunctive sentence the

verb is the principal part. The other parts of speech such as noun and adjective have to be understood only as modifying the verb. And, in the verb the injunctive suffix *(liṅ, loṭ* or *tavya)* is the most important factor. The injuctive suffix signifies *niyoga*, what-is-to-be-done, what-is-to-be-accomplished.

If it is true that even secular words have *niyoga* for purport, the Prābhākara would argue, it goes without saying that the Veda has *niyoga* as its sole purport. Existent entities are known through secular means of knowledge such as perception and inference. If the Veda too were to teach the existent, it would not be independent as a *pramāṇa*. It is only from the Veda that *niyoga* or *kārya* is known. That is why *kārya* is called *mānāntarāpūrva*, that which is novel and is not known through any other *pramāṇa*. Activity is what the Veda teaches primarily. It is not desire or appetition that prompts activity. What prompts it is the cognition of a command or *niyoga*. For instance, a servant executes an act simply because his master orders him to do it, even though he may have no desire in the matter. The Veda which is the supreme master issues certain commands. Wisdom

lies in obeying those commands. The Vedic *niyoga* is imperious. In order to accomplish itself, it makes the desired object, e.g. heaven, an end to be accomplised, through means such as sacrifice; and having thus got itself established, it gains the status of what-is-to-be-accomplished in relation to the object. Even the prompted person, the *niyojya*, is secondary ; it is *niyoga* that is primary. The Veda, in short, is *niyoga-śāstra*, the text that teaches *niyoga*.

In reply to the Prābhākara, the Advaitin would say: The meanings of words is not learnt always in association with action. Even if we concede that it is so learnt, it cannot be maintained that subsequently also if the meaning of words is to be understood there must be some reference to action. When a person is informed, for instance, that a son has been born to him, he is seen to be happy. Here, no activity is enjoined ; the statement is not a command. Yet the person concerned understands the meaning of the words conveyed to him. It is not correct to say that all words are related to *kārya*. If this were so, there would be no mutual relation among the words. The words that constitute a sentence are

in mutual relation ; they are not always related to *kārya*. Expectancy, competency and proximity are what bind words into a sentence. It was urged by the Mīmāṁsaka that the cognition of *niyoga*, and not desire, is what prompts activity. But it is not so. Activity can always be traced to some desire for acquisition or avoidance. Even in the case of the servant executing the commands of his master that was cited as an illustration, on further analysis it will be found that the motive behind the action is either to please the master or to avoid punishment. And, in the context of any action it is neither the command, where one is issued, nor the agent that is the principal factor, but the enjoyer of the desired fruit. The words of the Veda only help in understanding what is desirable and what is not. If the words are the cause of action, then everyone who hears them must act, which is not the case. Activity follows even on the cognition of existent things, such as a serpent. So, it is not a sound argument to say that activity springs only from the cognition of *niyoga*, and that the sole purport of the Veda is *niyoga*. The function of the Veda as a *pramāṇa* is to make known what is unknown,

and not to occasion activity. The Veda is valid only as making known the real nature of things, and not as directing activity. Thus, even in regard to the ritual section of the Veda it cannot be maintained that *kārya* is the purport.

As was observed above, there are some Vedāntins too who sponsor the view of *niyoga*. Their theory may be described as the *jñāna-niyoga-vāda*. According to this theory, the Veda (here, its *jñāna-kāṇḍa*) is not necessary for knowing the self. As the self is an entity, it is known through other *pramāṇas*. For example, through an enquiry into the three states of experience, waking, dream, and deep sleep, the nature of the self may be determined. If the Veda is required in the context of self-knowledge — as it is undoubtedly required — it is for suppressing the residual impressions of those states or to control the mind. When the residual impressions have been removed and the mind has been controlled as a consequence of obeying the vedic commands, the self which is self-luminous shines by itself without depending on any other means of valid knowledge. Thus the *jñānakānda* becomes valid only as teaching

what-is-to-be-done *(kārya)*, and not by expounding the nature of the self. The self is taught there as but subsidiary to the injunction of meditation. Therefore, the purport of the Upaniṣads that constitute the *jñāna-kāṇḍa*, as of the *karma-kāṇḍa*, is *niyoga*.

As against the *jñāna-niyoga-vādin*, the Advaitin makes the following points: It has already been shown that *niyoga* is not the purport of even the *karma-kāṇḍa*. It goes without saying, therefore, that the *jñāna-kāṇḍa* is not interested in *niyoga*. For the accomplishment of one's ends, *niyoga* is not necessary. That the relation of the self to residual impression is evil, and that evil should be removed may be known through reasoning. If this evil is not removed by the direct intuition of the self, continued meditation cannot remove it. Moreover, the mere absence of residual impression does not bring about release. In sleep there is no residual impression; but sleep is not release. It is nescience that is the cause of all evil including the soul's apparent conjunction with residual impression. Only self-knowledge which is the plenary experience can destroy nescience. Self-knowledge is independent, and is not

expectant of the cognition of what-is-to-be-done. Self-experience is the content of all means of knowledge. Need it be said that it is the content of Vedānta texts?

We may quote here a few passages from Śaṅkara's writings in regard to *karma* and knowledge:

"As for one who is afflicted with disease there is restoration of health when the disease is removed, so for one who is miserable there is restoration to his native state when the world of duality is resolved; the realization of non-duality is the fruit. And, since the world of duality is the effect of nescience, its resolution is through knowledge."[1]

"Action does not remove nescience, as it is not opposed to it; knowledge does destroy nescience, as light (destroys) dense darkness."[2]

"On account of ignorance, the Self appears conditioned as it were; when that is destroyed the pure Self, verily, shines of its own accord, like the sun when the cloud is dispelled."[3]

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[1] *Māṇḍūkya-kārikā-bhāṣya*, Introduction.

[2] *Ātma-bodha*, 3.

[3] *Ibid.*, 4.

181.482

"The opposition between wisdom *(jñāna)* and works *(karma)* is unshakable like a mountain. Bhagavān Vyāsa, the great Vedic teacher, taught his son conclusively after much reflection, thus: These two paths are taught in the Veda, one called the path of activity *(pravṛtti)* and the other of renunciation *(nivṛtti)*."[1]

"In the context of ritual there is no reference (to the Self) because such reference would be incompatible therewith. Therefore, the true Self which is to be made known here (in the Upaniṣad) is not spoken of in the context of ritual. If it be asked 'Why is it so?' we reply: 'The true knowledge of the Self, verily, is in conflict with ritual. The Self that is to be made known, indeed, is of the nature of the unexcellable *Brahman*..... Not certainly does one who has been consecrated for self-rule and has attained *Brahman* desire to bow to anyone; he who has realized the truth in the form '*I am Brahman*' cannot cause anyone to act. He who regards *Brahman* as the self- complete end will not see any use in action. And no one will engage

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[1] *Īs āvāsya-upaniṣad-bhāṣya*, 2.

himself in action that is known to be futile. Therefore, knowledge is surely opposed to action. Thus it is intelligible that in the context of ritual there is no reference to self-knowledge."[1]

"It is not proper that *Brahman*-knowledge which rejects all notions of distinction of action, causal correlates, and fruit, should need a subsidiary or relation to an auxiliary means; for *Brahman*-knowledge has for content the inner Self which excludes all objects, and whose fruit is liberation. It has been said: 'One desirous of release should always renounce action along with its means. It is only by one that so renounces that the inner Self which is the supreme goal is realized.' Therefore, it is not intelligible that knowledge should require the help of, or be dependent on, action."[2]

An important question, then, arises: if *jñāna* is the means to mokṣa, and not *karma*, is there no place at all for *karma* in the aspirants' discipline? The Advaitin's answer is this: the competence to tread the path of

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[1] *Kena-upaniṣad-vākya-bhāṣya*, Introduction.

[2] *Kena-upaniṣad-pāda-bhāṣya*. iv 7.

knowledge is gained only when one's mind has become pure For the purification of the mind, the means is *karma-yoga*, the performance of one's duties without attachment to results.

Disinterested and dedicated action *(niṣkāmakarma, karmayoga)* serves to purify the mind, and thus becomes a remote auxiliary of the path of knowledge. Although knowledge itself is not an act, it is the mind that has to seek for and gain it. A mind that is impure, filled with passions and selfish desires, cannot even turn in the direction of self-knowledge. The discipline by which the passions may be eliminated is the performance of one's duties without caring for rewards. The craving for possessions, the thirst for sense-enjoyments, is what defiles the mind and makes it unfit for the higher pursuits. Therefore, the mind must first be freed from defilements through actions that are not directed towards finite ends. This is *karma-yoga*.

Two paths, we are told, were disclosed to man in ancient times, the path of active involvement in the affairs of the world, and the path of complete renunciation of

worldliness and indviduality. The former is what we, ordinary human beings, are used to ; the latter is possible only in the case of a few highly evolved souls The excellence of the *Gītā* lies in its reconciliation between these two ways, by importing the spirit of renunciation into every action that one has to perform. " You have a right to work alone, and not to the fruit thereof," says Śrī Kṛṣṇa, " Let not the fruit of action be your object, nor let your attachment be to inaction."

It is not action that binds us so much as our attachment to the fruit of our action. So, desirelessness or freedom from attachment is what we should first achieve. By mere inaction it is not possible to have this. We may be inactive outside, but intensely active inside. Action does not mean mere bodily movement. It is the soul's sense of agency by a wrong identification with its body. Freedom from the sense of agency cannot be gained by making the body motionless. The desire for inactivity is as much harmful as that for the fruit of action. So, the principle of *karma-yoga* is: Let not the desire for fruit be your motive for action; do not long for inaction too.

Is it possible to act without motive, it may be asked. The reply of the *Gītā* is this. It is true that there cannot be endeavour without motive. But instead of having a different motive for each action, have one and the same motive for all actions. Each action will, no doubt, bring in its own result. Regard that as a consequence and not as the end sought for. What, then, is the one end of all actions? The *Gītā* formulates it in two ways. For those who aim at the realization of the non-dual Brahman, the end of action is inner purification. Unless the mind is thoroughly cleansed, the sun of wisdom will not rise. For those who are theistically inclined, the goal of action is realizing God. As the Gītācārya puts it, man attains perfection by worshipping God through the performance of his allotted work.

The worship of God is *bhakti*. *Bhakti* has an important place in the scheme of Advaita discipline. I have clearly pointed out in the first lecture how relevant the idea of God is for Advita. The object of being devoted to God is to gain His grace, and to achieve one-pointedness of mind. It is to be noted that Hinduism in general — and Vedānta

in particular — does not take any narrow view of devotion to God. Indian theism has certain unique characteristics. In the first place, it is not fanatical in its outlook, and it provides for a variety of conceptions of the Godhead. No one has a right to say that his view of God is the only view. As early as the age of the Ṛg-veda, it was discovered that, though the Truth is one, it is called variously by sages. As the *Mahābhārata* puts it, there is no *muni* without a view of his own. This is as it should be. As no two minds are identical, the form of faith that suits one may not suit another. Śrī Kṛṣṇa expressly declares that there are different ways to God, and that even those who worship other gods reach Him alone. What one finds in Hinduism is, thus, a philosophical theism, which is often mistaken for polytheism. The Hindu is prepared to bow before many gods, because he knows that the principle of Divinity is the same in all the gods. This is one important feature of Indian theism.

A second feature of Indian theism is that it openly recognizes the need for anthropomorphism. So long as we are human, we have necessarily to conceive of God as a

person. Worship is not possible without image making. To think of God as the Father in Heaven is as much an image as the idol carved out of stone or made out of metal. And, within human limitations we may think of God in any form as Father, Mother, Son, etc. The purpose of religious devotion is to transfer our emotions from the perishable objects to the imperishable Reality. In the Purāṇas we have stories of how even those who regarded God as Enemy Number One attained Him through their enmity.

It is true that we have to take a human view of God. But we have also to overcome this limitation. So, the Hindu Scriptures teach that God is omnipresent, i.e. present in every form that we see. Śrī Kṛṣṇa declares in the *Gītā* that He resides in the heart of every being, and that Vāsudeva is everything. He is in the good and bad, in beauty and ugliness, in construction and destruction, in life and death. To demonstrate this vividly and in a dramatic manner, Śrī Kṛṣṇa manifests to Arjuna in the eleventh chapter His cosmic form *(viśva-rūpa)*, a form which is divine and awful at the same time, with many mouths and eyes, presenting many a wonder-

ful sight, decked beautifully, and having faces on all sides. This, however, is a form the sight of which all cannot stand. Even Arjuna could not bear to behold it for long, inspite of the Eye-Divine granted him by the Lord, and so he had to implore Śrī Kṛṣṇa to assume back his human shape. To those who do not have the power to see God everywhere, the Gītācārya says, 'See Me as the topmost member in each species'. After enumerating some of His superior manifestations, Śrī Kṛṣṇa sums up saying, 'Whatever is glorious, brilliant or powerful, know that to be a manifestation of a portion of My splendour'.

The doctrine of Avatāra also is peculiar to Hinduism. Srī Kṛṣṇa says in the *Gītā* that, whenever virtue subsides and vice prevails, He incarnates Himself in order to protect the good and punish the wicked. Cosmic balance has to be preserved; and for this purpose God comes in a tangible form, half concealing and half manifesting His divinity. He comes as the saviour of the world; and even the punishment He metes out to the transgressors proves to be for their good. Truly speaking, there is neither friend nor foe to the Lord,

because all are the same to Him. Each person benefits, according to his eligibility, when the waters of Heaven descend to the earth and flow along human channels. Such descents are the Incarnations or Avatāras.

Devotion to any of the forms of God is called *bhakti*. The external accessories of worship are not important. What is essential is that we should offer ourselves to Him. The offering of a flower or a fruit is only symbolic. The ideal devotee is one who leads a dedicated life. "Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever oblation you place in the sacred fire, whatever you bestow as a gift, whatever you do by way of penance, offer it to Me," says the Lord. When one's love of God becomes constant and complete, one attains wisdom through His grace, the wisdom which liberates the soul from the bonds.

Rāja-yoga or *dhyāna-yoga* is the method of mind-control through concentration and meditation. This is also an auxiliary discipline to the path of knowledge. This method which is generally referred to as *yoga* is very ancient. In the *Upaniṣads* and the *Bhagavad-gītā*, the yoga-technique of controlling the mind is taught. The basic text of the classical

Yoga school, however, is the *Yoga-sūtra* of Patañjali. The most important concept of the Yoga school is that of *citta* (mind). By itself the *citta* is all-pervading, and is called the *kāraṇa-citta* (the cause-mind). But when it is associated with a body it contracts, and is called the *kārya-citta* (the effect-mind). The object of *yoga* is to make the *citta* assume its orginal, pure unmodified status, and thus release the *puruṣa* (soul) from its travail.

It is through the functioning of the *citta* that the *puruṣa* acts, enjoys and suffers. The functionings produce also latent tendencies which, in turn, give rise to other tendencies; and thus the cycle of *saṁsāra* revolves. Tossed by the surge of desires and passions, the individual ego is restless and knows no peace; it is subject to the five afflictions of *avidyā* (ignorance), *asmitā* (erroneous identification of the self with the mind, body, etc.), *rāga* (attachment), *dveṣa* (aversion), and *abhiniveśa* (the instinctive clinging to life and dread of death. In order to free the self from the stranglehold of *prakṛti*, the modifications of the mind must be quelled. The modifications are *pramāṇa* (valid knowledge), *viparyaya* (false knowledge), *vikalpa* (verbal

knowledge), *nidrā* (sleep and dream), and *smṛti* (memory). These must be abolished by removing the afflictions.

How are the afflictions to be removed and the mental modifications suppressed? Through continued endeavour (*abhyāsa*) and dispassion *(vairāgya)*. It is only by long practice that a person acquires the habit of detachment which will impart to him the discriminative knowledge of the self and the not self. The details of this practice are set forth in the form of eight steps which are called the limbs of *yoga (aṣṭāṅga-yoga)*. The eight steps are: *yama* (abstentions), *niyama* (observances), *āsana* (posture), *prāṇāyāma* (control of breath), *pratyāhāra* (withdrawal of senses from their objects), *dhāraṇā* (fixed attention), *dhyāna* (meditation), and *samādhi* (concentration).

The first two, *yama and niyama*, constitute the ethical basis of *yoga*. The third, fourth, and fifth members of *yoga*, viz. *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, and *pratyāhāra*, govern respectively the disciplining of body, vital-force, and sense-organs, and are accessary to mind-control. The last three limbs of *yoga*, viz. *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna* and *samādhi* mark the

different stages of concentration. It is they that constitute *yoga* proper. Together they are called *saṁyama (constraint)*. A perfectly controlled and concentrated mind is essential for a fruitful inquiry into the nature of Brahman.

Bhāratītīrtha-Vidyāraṇya, in his *Pañcadaśī*, devotes a full chapter to *dhyāna* (meditation). He distinguishes the way of meditation from the way of discrimination and declares that the former, though not directly instrumental to Brahman-intuition, is an auxiliary thereto. Meditation is prescribed in the Upaniṣads for those who are not fit for the path of knowledge. It arrests the current of the mind which courses its way to objects of sense, and causes it to contemplate Brahman. Meditation on Brahman may be compared to a delusion that becomes fruitful. A delusion which yields a fruitful result is called *saṁvādi-bhrama*. *Visaṁvādi-bhrama* is a delusion which does not lead to any fruitful consequence. Both the light of a lamp and the light of a gem may be mistaken for a gem. Both are cases of delusion. But the man who mistakes the lamp-light for gem and approaches it gains nothing,

whereas the man who mistakes the light of a gem for the gem itself gets the gem. Meditation on Brahman is like the latter. There is meditation on Brahman with attributes *(saguṇa)*; there is also meditation on Brahman without attributes *(nirguṇa)*. The latter is superior to the former. The criterion by which the superiority of a particular method is determined is its relative proximity to Brahman-knowledge. That which is more proximate to Brahman-knowledge is superior to that which is less proximate. Judged by this standard, meditation on the attributeless Brahman is superior to the remoter methods like the performance of rites and rituals. Just as *saṁvādi-bhrama* becomes very much like valid knowledge at the time of yielding fruit, even so *dhyāna* or *upāsanā*, when it matures, becomes like knowledge at the time of release.

A text of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad,* expresses in a negative mode what are required to be cultivated before one could know the Self: "Not he who has not ceased from evil conduct, who is not calm, who has no concentration, whose mind has not become quiescent, can attain this (the Self) through knowledge."[1]

[1] *Katha Upaniṣad,* ii, 24.

In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, thirteenth chapter, the following are metioned as the ingredients of the means to knowledge: (1) absence of conceit; (2) freedom from pride; (2) non-violence; (4) forbearance; (5) rectitude; (6) devoted service to the teacher; (7) purity; (8) unswerving endeavour in the path to release; (9) self-control; (10) non-attachment to the objects of sense; (11) egolessness; (12) perception of defects in birth, death, old age, disease, and sorrow; (13) detachment; (14) refraining from passionate sticking on to a son, wife, house, etc.; (15) keeping the mind always in a state of equanimity, in the presence of both desirable and undesirable things; (16) constant and undivided devotion to God gained through Yoga that results in the realization of non-separateness; (17) seeking places of solitude; (18) absence of longing for the company of people who are devoid of spiritual inclinations; (19) constancy in the pursuit of Self-knowledge; and (20) realizing that release is the goal of true knowledge.[1]

Interpreting the word *atha* (then) in the *Brahmasūtra*, *atha ataḥ brahma-jñāsā* (Then, therefore, the desire to know Brahman),

[1] *Bhagavad-gītā*, xii, 7–11.

Śaṅkara says that it means 'after acquiring the four-fold qualification.' The four qualifications are: (1) discrimination of the eternal from the non-eternal; (2) non-attachment to the enjoyment of fruits either of this world or of the other world; (3) possession in abundance of six virtues, viz., calmness, equanimity, turning away from sense-objects, forbearance, concentration and faith, and (4) longing for release. He who is endowed with the fourfold qualification (sādhana-catuṣṭaya) is the person who is eligible for the path of knowledge which is the path of self-inquiry *(ātma-vicāra)*.

The path itself consists of three steps: hearing or study (*śravaṇa*), reflection (*manana*), and contemplation *(nididhyāsana)*. Hearing or study stands for the proper understanding of the meaning of Vedāntic statements. The statements are of two kinds: intermediary texts and major texts. The intermediary texts relate to the nature of the world, the nature of the individual soul, the nature of the non-dual self, etc. The major texts impart the supreme knowledge of identity. From the intermediary texts, only mediate knowledge of the truth is gained. From the

major texts, the direct experience of the plenary reality may be obtained. In the case of the supremely competent inquirer, even a single hearing of the major text 'that thou art' *(tattvamasi)* will do to effect release. But in the case of others, this does not happen because of impediments. The impediments are in the form of long-established false beliefs, the belief that the teaching of the Vedānta is impossible *(asaṁbhāvanā)*, and the belief that the contrary is the truth (*viparītabhāvanā*). The first of these beliefs should be countermanded through rational reflection *(manana)*; and the second should be destroyed through the practice of contemplation *(nididhyāsana)*. When the impediments have been removed, there arises the intuitive experience of the non-dual spirit. The intuition which is the final mental mode is technically called *akhaṇḍākāravṛtti*. This is what is known as the direct knowledge of the self; it is the mode of the mind whose content is the self. Although it is a mode of the mind, it is not like the other modes. It destorys the other modes and finally destroys itself, with the result that the self-luminous non-dual spirit alone remains. The final mental mode destroys

nescience; when nescience is destroyed, bondage disappears, and there is gained self-realization which is release.

Let me now discuss what knowledge is, and how it differs from action. In order to understand what knowledge is — that is, in fact, knowledge of knowledge — we should contrast it with action. Although both action and knowledge relate to the mind, action is what the agent does and is dependent on his will, whereas knowledge must be conditioned by its object. Action is *kartṛtantra*, it depends on the agent. Knowledge is *vastu-tantra;* it depends on its content. For instance, it is within the sphere of a man's will to decide to go to a place or not to go, and if to go how to go there. It is not so with knowledge. If what is in front of me is a post and I mistake it for a ghost, that would not be knowledge. Knowledge should conform to its content; it cannot be arbitrarily constituted by an act of will. Will is not Idea. Opinion and belief, in so far as they are conditioned by will, do not constitute knowledge. If one worships an Image believing it to be Viṣṇu, one may obtain the appropriate meritorious results; but this is

not a case of knowledge. Acts may precede knowledge such as the act of turning the face in the direction of the object and opening the eyes, etc., in visual perception. But perception itself consists in the revelation of its content.

From the definition of the nature of knowledge follows the identity of knowledge with truth. Knowledge is truth, and truth is knowledge. What is called false knowledge is not knowledge; it is ignorance. Truth is intrinsic to knowledge; error is extrinsic. It is true that relatively speaking, we distinguish between true knowledge and false, and that there are various criteria of truth and falsity. The realists believe that truth consists in correspondence between fact and idea. If there is one-one correlation between the thing that is out there and the idea that is within, knowledge is said to be true; otherwise not. But how are we to know that there is correspondence? We have no means of getting at fact except through idea; how, then, can we compare the two? To escape this difficulty some realists like the *Naiyāyikas* suggest that while correspondence is the nature of truth, utility is the test of truth.

The Western pragmatists go still further and say that there is no truth other than utility. Truth is efficacy. Knowledge is an instrument to action. That knowledge is true which works, or can be cashed. Rejecting this cash-view of truth, the idealists conceive of it as systematic coherence. That knowledge is true which is coherent or self-consistent.

Empirically speaking, again, there are several means of valid knowledge — perception, inference, testimony, comparison, presumption, and non-cognition. Not all the schools of thought accept all these avenues of knowledge. In the history of philosophy many a battle royal has been fought on the question of the relative importance of perception or sensation and thought or understanding. The empiricists emphasize the role of sensation in knowledge, while the rationalists rely on reason. The former refer all knowledge to sensation as its source and test; the latter advocate apriorism which is the defence of truth as independent of sense-experience. The great German philosopher Kant attempted a compromise by stating that both sensation and reason are required for all empirical knowledge, i.e. knowledge of

phenomena: a thing must be given in sensation and must also conform to the categories of the understanding; only then it becomes known. All knowledge of phenomena, according to Kant, is both synthetic and *apriori*. Indian thought, in general, makes a distinction between immediate knowledge and mediate knowledge. Mediate knowledge which is knowledge through reasoning cannot by itself yield certitutde. It must have its basis in immediate knowledge. In the case of empirical knowledge, it is sense-perception that is the basis. But sensation is not the only kind of immediacy or directness in knowledge. Intuitive insight which does not depend on sensation is the higher type of immediate knowledge. While sensation is infra-rational, intuition is supra-rational. For empirical knowledge, reason is an auxiliary to sensation; for transcendent knowledge it must subserve intuition. Without either type of immediacy to fall back upon, logic will be without a foundation. Mere logic will lead to endless disputes and will not yield any settled conclusion. It is well known, says Śaṅkara, that logical reasonings end in disputation because of mutual opposition *(tarka-jñānānām tu*

anyonya-virodhāt prasiddhā vipratipattiḥ). Even sense-perception is not immediate of the first order. Since one has to depend here on the senses, the knowledge that results is not quite immediate, and may go wrong. The only self-certifying and self-evident knowledge is the knowledge that is the self.

According to some schools of Indian philosophy, like *Nyāya*, knowledge is an attribute of the self. But Advaita Vedānta teaches that knowledge is the very essence of the self. The knowledge that we attribute to the mind is reflected knowledge, knowledge of the second order. It is here that we have the triple division — of knower, object known, and process of knowing. In the original knowledge, that is the self, there is no such division. The non-dual self is limitless consciousness, abiding awareness. It neither rises nor sets. It is constant and unvarying light. While relativity belongs to the realm of empirical knowledge, there can be no relation in self-knowledge that is absolute. True knowledge, observes Śaṅkara, is of a single nature, since it is dependent on Reality; even in the world we say that that is real which is of one consistency, and that the

knowledge thereof is true, as for instance the knowledge that fire is hot.

Is not knowledge, it may be asked, an act of the mind ? The reply is that knowledge is not an act. Action is dependent on the will of the agent ; knowledge should conform to the nature of reality. To go to a distant town, for instance, action is necessary. The action of going, however, is determined by the will of the agent. One may go, or not go, or go by alternative modes of transport. But the case of knowledge is otherwise. In the matter of perceiving a green parrot perching on a tree, for example, the perceiver has no option. He cannot " will " to perceive it as a leaf. Knowledge must conform to the object. It is true that action may precede knowledge but knowledge itself is not an act. In a recent book, " *A three fold Cord* ", which is in the form of a dialogue between Viscount Samuel and Professor Herbert Dingle covering the areas of Science, Philosophy, and Religion, the following explanation offered by Professor Dingle, of the distinction between experience and voluntary action will be found to be instructive. " By experience I mean that of which we are aware, that which is

given to us, so to speak without our having designed it and independently of any wish of our own.....Voluntary action, on the other hand, is what we choose to do and could avoid doing if we would. Of course, the two things are often associated with one another. I might choose to look at the sky to see the stars, but my choice here is merely that of opening my eyes and turning in a certain direction: what I then experience is not of my contrivance" (pp. 251–2). If this is so even in the matter of the knowledge of empirical objects, it is clear that knowledge of the Self is not of the nature of an act. Self-awareness is the plenary experience; it is not willed activity.

As we have said already, the path of knowledge consists of three phases: study *(śravaṇa)*, reflection *(manana)*, and contemplation *(nididhyāsana)*. Of these three, which is the principal? Over this question the two principal post-Śaṅkara Advaita traditions differ. According to the *Vivaraṇa* view, it is *śravaṇa* that is the immediate instrument of knowledge; and according to the *Bhāmatī* view, it is *nididhyāsana* or *prasaṅkhyāna* (continued meditation). Vācaspati, the

founder of the *Bhāmatī* tradition, who regards verbal testimony *(śabda)* as yeilding only mediate knowledge and who considers the mind to be a sense-organ, holds that continued meditation is the instrument of Brahma-intuition. He inherits this view from Maṇḍana who thinks that knowledge generated by *śabda* can be only mediate. *Avidyā* (nescience) can be removed by immediate knowledge alone. Verbal testimony is unable to do this, since it signifies what is related *(saṁsṛṣṭa)* and mediate *(parokṣa)*. Hence the need for *bhāvanā* or meditation which can transmute the mediate knowledge gained form verbal testimony into immediate intuition.

The *Vivaraṇa* view is that verbal testimony is capable of generating the immediate knowledge of the self-luminous Brahman. But when there is obstruction through the notions of impossibility and the illusory cognition of the contrary, there does not arise unshakable immediate experience. Hence are required reflection and contemplation. The function of these is only to remove the obstacles in the way of intuition through the Vedānta texts. Verbal testimony yields even in the

first instance immediate cognition, and that cognition becomes unshakable later on the removal of the obstalces. Or, we may even say that verbal testimony at first gives rise to mediate cognition of Brahman, and again generates immediate cognition on the removal of the obstacles. In any case, verbal testimony is directly the *kāraṇa* (instrument) of Brahman-intuition.

Vācaspati's claim that the mind is a sense organ is rejected on the ground that since mind is a common factor in all knowledge it cannot serve as a distinctive instrument for a particular type of knowledge alone. The self is by its very nature immediate. And so, no meditation is necessary for making it immediate. Its immediacy may well be revealed by the major texts (*mahāvākyas*) of the Upaniṣads. Moreover, what is *prasaṅkhyāna*? It is the repetition of 'hearing' *(śravaṇa)* and reflection *(manana)*. How can repetition bring about immediate experience? No excellence is seen to be occasioned in an object by the repetition of a *pramāṇa*. If the Upaniṣad texts like 'That thou art' do not have the power to evoke direct experience, they cannot acquire that power by mere repetition. In

fact, however, there does arise the intuitive experience of the self from the text 'That thou art', etc. In the story of the ten travellers, when the tenth man who forgot to count himself is told 'You are the tenth', he directly apprehends his identity, realizing that he is the apparently lost man. If it be asked, why then does not the first hearing of the text 'That thou art' produce intuitive experience in most cases, the reply is that unless obstacles are removed a cause does not give rise to its effect. *Karma* and meditation are useful only as removers of obstacles in the way of *jñāna* arising from *śravaṇa*. The direct means to *jñāna*, however, is the Vedānta text itself. Thus, the Upaniṣads are the *pramāṇa* for the reality which is the self, Brahman-Ātman, because they convey true knowledge, because they are free from defective causes, because they are never sublated, and because they lead to the highest human goal.

Although the two traditions in Advaita differ in regard to the immediate instrument that occasions knowledge, it is to be noted that they are agreed on the teaching that the direct means to release is *jñāna*, the path of inquiry and enlightenment.

Let me now turn to a brief exposition of the path of Self-inquiry as taught by Ramaṇa Maharshi, the Sage of Arunachala.

The teachings of Śrī Ramaṇa Maharshi in regard to "The Path", it will be seen, are in perfect accord with the position of Advaita. The Maharshi's teachings are uniquely valuable because they constitute an independent confirmation of the truth of Advaita. Ramaṇa did not formulate a theory after a formal study of Vedānta; he discovered the path afresh, gained the plenary experience through the technique of self-inquiry, and later when the texts were read out to him, he knew that they were speaking the same heart-language as he had become conversant with,—the language of Advaita.

The plenary experience came to Ramaṇa, and the path that led to it opened out before him, without any forewarning or conscious preparation, when he was a lad of seventeen, in 1896. He was a youth enjoying robust health; his class fellows were even afraid of his strength and courage. But, for no reason whatsoever, one day, he was seized with the dread of death. A strong feeling that he was going to die possessed him. Any other youth

would have succumbed to the feeling, and would have run to a physician, an elder, or a friend for succour. But Ramaṇa did not seek for a way of escape from the crisis; he was determined to confront it; he welcomed the encounter with death. This was what he did. He dramatized death. He lay down on the floor — this happened in a small room on the first floor of his uncle's house at Madurai where he was staying, — stretched his limbs out and held them stiff as though *rigor mortis* had set in. He held his breath and kept his mouth tightly closed; his body resembled in every respect a corpse. Then followed the inquiry: What is it that dies? The body is dead; it will be consigned to the flames, and reduced to ashes. But, "I" am not the body, since I am aware of the body and its death. So, death cannot touch me; I am the deathless spirit. Although when expressed in words, the inquiry appears to be a process of ratiocination, it was not, in fact, a piece of reasoning. The truth came in a flash, as it were; Ramaṇa became aware of it directly, immediately. The dread of death vanished at once and for ever. Abidance as the self became constant and permanent.

Ramaṇa himself gave an account of this experience, a long time after, in response to the request of devotees at Tiruvannamalai. An analysis of this account will reveal the elements leading to Advaita-experience and the characteristics thereof, so far as words can express. The dread of death wrought a revolution in the life of Ramaṇa (then known as Venkataraman). The attention was withdrawn from the external objects, and directed towards the self. The vision became in-turned, the mind in-drawn. This led to the perception of the self — clear, distinct, and indubitable perception that was to last for ever. This became the basic note, the fundamental *śruti*, underlying all the apparent variations in experience. The previous interests, former attachments — all of them disappeared. Ramaṇa became indifferent to the surroundings, to kinsmen, to friends, to studies. He was no longer affected by the dual throng that constitutes the world — cold and heat, praise and blame, etc. All this was because the 'I-am-the-body' idea was dead and 'I-am-the-self' consciousness had become the permanent experience. This was the Great Awakening gained through intuitive inquiry —

the state of pure illumination, self-effulgent light.

Ramaṇa Maharshi was no writer in the usual sense of the term. Sometimes he reduced to writing his occasional oral instructions. The writings are in prose and in verse — mostly in Tamil, some in Sanskrit, and a few in Malayalam and Telugu. These writings of the Maharshi constitute for us what may rightly be called the *Ramaṇopaniṣad*; for here we have authentic instruction in the truth of Advaita.

The two earliest prose-writings of Ramaṇa bear the titles "*Self-inquiry*" and "*Who am I?*" These were not composed as essays for the general reader, but were written down in answer to the queries put by two early devotees. They were written down on the floor, or on a slate, or on bits of paper. This Ramaṇa did, not because he was observing a vow of silence, but because he had no inclination to talk. This circumstance has conferred a unique blessing on posterity, as it was responsible for the Master writing down his earliest instructions with his own hand.

The central teaching of these written instructions is that the path of self-inquiry is

the direct means to self-realization. This is the substance of the teaching: the sense of "I" is natural and common to all beings. But, seldom does one enquire into the precise nature of 'I'. We take 'I' for granted, and employ such empirical usage as 'I came', 'I went', 'I did', or 'I was'. What is this 'I'? What am I? Not much effort is required to discover that the body is not 'I'. The body was not there before birth, nor will it survive death. In deep sleep there is not the 'I-am-the-body' consciousness. Even in the state of waking, I am aware of the body, and therefore, I cannot be the body. Thus, with some practice, one can without difficulty know that the body is not 'I'. What is more difficult to realize is that the ego is not 'I'. From ignorance springs the ego. The ego is the basic super-imposition on the self. The 'I'-thought is the first of all thoughts. The mind itself is 'I'-thought. The mind and the ego are the same. Ordinarily it goes out through the sense-organs and apprehends and enjoys the external objects. It should be made to turn within and inquire into the nature and source of itself. This is to be done with the still mind. The inquiry is of the

form 'who am I?' This, according to the Master, "is the only method of putting an end to all misery and ushering in supreme Beatitude. Whatever may be said and however phrased, this is the whole truth in a nutshell."[1]

Explaining the technique of self-inquiry, Ramaṇa says, "By a steady and continuous investigation into the nature of the mind, the mind is transformed into that to which the 'I' refers; and that is in fact the Self".[2] One has to ask oneslf "Whence does the 'I'-thought arise?" When the inquiry is persisted in, it will be seen that the ego dissolves itself in the self which is the Heart *(hṛdayam)*. It is true that the mind will get distracted quite often, and will stray outward. But, every time this happens, the mind must be brought back to inquire into its nature. This is to be done until the mind subsides in its source, the Self. For this, there is no other means more effective and adequate than Self-inquiry. Other means such as control of breath *(prāṇāyāma)* and meditation involving mind-control *(yoga)* may lead to a temporary subsidence of the mind, and not to final liberation.

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[1] *Collected Works*, p. 18.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 33.

In the path of Self-inquiry, it is the mind, it is true, that investigates. But this self-investigation annihilates the mind, and itself gets destroyed eventually, just as the stick used to stir the funeral pyre is itself finally burnt. This is the state of liberation. Here, it is realized that there is no mind at all. What appeared as the mind is but the Self. It is the Self that is manifest as 'I-I'. This is *ahaṅ-sphuraṇa*, *prajñāna* (self-manifestation, wisdom)

Thus, according to Ramaṇa, *jñāna-yoga* is the supreme path. Just as in Patañjali's yoga there are eight steps, in *jñāna* also there are eight steps, Ramaṇa explains. The first two, *yama* (rules of abstentions) and *niyama* (rules of observances) are the same for both. There are no regulations regarding *āsāna* (posture) here, in the path of *jñāna;* any posture will do. One may practise it in any place or time. *Prāṇāyāma* consists of exhalation, inhalation, and retention of breath. In the path of knowledge, exhalation stands for giving up the two aspects of name and form, of body and world; inhalation, for taking in (grasping) the *sat* (being), *cit* (consiousness), and *ānanda* (bliss) aspects pervading names

and forms; and retention for restraining them, assimilating what have been taken in. The next step is *pratyāhāra*. Here it means "being ever on the vigil that the rejected names and forms do not intrude again into the mind". *Dhāraṇā* which is the next, "is retaining the mind in the heart, so that it does not wander, by holding firm to the concept already grasped, that is: 'I am the *sat-cit-ānanda Ātman* (the self which is Being-Consciousness-Bliss)." *Dhyāna* (meditation) is steady abidance as *ahaṁsvarūpa* (self-nature). And, *samādhi* is the natural state of self-awareness. This is *mokṣa*,[1] liberation. Comparing the two paths, *jñāna-yoga* and *rāja-yoga*, Ramaṇa observes thus: "the path of knowledge is like taming an unruly bull by showing before it a bundle of grass, that of yoga is like taming it and yoking it."[2]

Ātma-vicāra is, thus, the right royal road to Self-realization. All can take to it, even the sinner — only the sinner should cast away the thought that he is a sinner. It is not that regulation of food, cultivation of virtues, etc., have not their use. They are

[1] *Collected Work* p. 27.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

useful in so far as they assist one in the practice of *Ātma-vicāra*. Dispassion, *vairāgya*, is essential. In fact, *vairāgya* and *jñāna* are one and the same. "Just as the pearl-diver, tying stones to his waist, dives down into the depths, and gets the pearl from the sea-bed, so every aspirant, pledged to *vairāgya*, can dive deep into himself and realize the precious Ātman." [1]

As in the prose-writings, so in the poetical compositions, Ramaṇa Maharshi teaches the path of knowledge and the truth of Advaita. In two of these poems, *Ulladu-nārpadu* (Forty Verses on Existence), and *Upadeśa-sāram* (The Essence of Instruction), we have compendious and clear expositions of the discipline that the seeker after truth should go through in order to gain Self-realization.

In the *Ulladu-nārpadu*, the path of self-inquiry is thus explained: 'I'-thought is the first to rise. In the inert things there is no sense of 'I'. It is the mind that consists of thoughts. The first of these thoughts is 'I'. The core of the discipline is that one should

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

inquire with a keen mind whence this 'I' rises. When it is said "The 'I' rises", what is meant is that herein lies the knot of the self and the not-self which is called, technically, superimposition or nescience. Bondage, soul, the subtle body, egoity, transmigration, mind — all these are but synonyms. It is the 'I'-thought or ego that functions in various ways. Dwelling within the body, it acts, enjoys, experiences; leaving one body, it enters into another. But, when its nature is inquired into, it takes to flight; it turns out to be devoid of substance. The ego is the prop of all appearances. If the ego is, all else is. If the ego is not, nothing else is. The ego is all. When what the ego is, is inquired into and its non-reality is known, all phenomena are given up. When, through inquiry, the state where the 'I' does not rise is reached, one realizes that one is the non-dual self. When the 'I' is lost, the self is gained. One should dive into oneself, with senses and functions controlled, and find the place whence the 'I' rises in order to recover the self, even as one would dive into water in order to get back some precious jewel that has fallen into it. The path of knowledge does not consist

in the verbal repetition of the word 'I'. The inquiry should be done with the mind turned inward. This is the direct path. The path of meditation which is of the form 'I am not this ; I am that' is not inquiry ; it is not an auxiliary discipline. Through the inquiry 'who am I', the mind reaches the Heart, which is only another expression for the Self. Then the ego, the pseudo-'I', sinks crest-fallen, and the real 'I', the Self, shines of its own accord. This real 'I' is not an object ; it is the plenary reality. The destruction of the ego through inquiry, and the gaining of Self-awareness — other than this, there is nothing to be accomplished. Pure Self-awareness is perfection. This is the realization that one is always the Self, and that there is no other reality.

Self-inquiry is the path. Indulging in metaphysical speculations is not useful. 'Does anything exist, or not?' 'Is reality with form, or without form?' 'Is it one, two, or neither?' : these are questions engendered by ignorance. Similarly, questions about time, space, the world and God, do not lead us out of ignorance, as also questions about fate and free-will, etc. When such questions arise, the

inquirer should ask the basic question: To whom do these questions arise? One must question about the questioner. When the questioner is known, there will be no questions left to be answered.

To seek and abide as the eternally accomplished Self is the true accomplishment. Delusion and delusion-bred misery disappear when one is established in the natural state of the Self. The Self is not something which is to be newly realized. In fact, even the expression 'realization' is not apt. The real does not need to be *realized*. The term should be understood in a fugurative sense. Self-realization is comparable to the realization by the tenth man of his identity in the story of ten travellers. The supreme truth is that there is no plurality at all; from the standpoint of the Absolute, there is no bondage, no release, there is no one bound and none to be released. All-that-is is the non-dual Self.

Thus, the *Ulladu-nārpadu* is a grand poem whose theme is the nature of the ultimate reality and the path that leads to it.

In the *Upadeśa-sāram*, the Master gives the same teaching in a more concise and quintessential form. Action does not lead to

liberation. But acts that are performed without attachment to fruits help by cleansing the mind and rendering it fit for pursuing the path of knowledge. Similarly, the other disciplines such as offering worship to the deity, uttering the sacred *mantras*, and meditation, which pertain respectively to the body, speech and mind, are auxiliaries to the path. Slowly, the different aspects of the organism and its functions should be sublimated, through *karma*, *bhakti*, and *yoga*; gradually one should adopt subtler and subtler modes of discipline, discarding the grosser ones. The value of these disciplines consists in the measure of their contribution to the progress in the direct path. The direct path for all is the mind's investigation of its own nature, resulting in the realization that there is no such thing as mind. As we have already seen, the mind is but a bundle of thoughts; the first thought is 'I'. One should investigate into the source of the 'I'—thought; one should seek for it within; then one would find that 'I' vanishes, leaving, the Self resplendent in its positive glory. To know the Self is to be the Self, for there are not two selves — one that knows and another that is known.

When, thus, one's true nature is known, there is endless Awareness-Bliss. This is release.

In a quintad of verses, *Sādhana-pañcaka*, ascribed to Śaṅkara, the disciplines required for gaining release are set forth in an ascending order. The tradition about this composition is this. On the eve of Śaṅkara's departure from this world, his disciples gathered round him and begged him for his final instruction. In response to their request Śaṅkara is said to have composed this quintad known also as *Upadeśa-pañcaka* (the Five Verses of Instruction): (1) Let the Veda be studied everyday; let the *karma* taught there be performed well; through such performance let God be worshipped; let one reject all thought of desire-prompted action; let the stream of sin be shaken off; let one reflect on the defects in empirical pleasures; let one endeavour in the direction of inquiring into the nature of the Self; let one go out of one's home quickly; (2) let there be association with the good; let there be cultivated firm devotion to God; let virtues like calmness, etc., be practised; let *karma* with its stranglehold be given up soon; let a good teacher be approached; let everyday

his *pādukās* be worshipped; let him be entreated to teach the one-lettered Brahman, i.e. Oṁkāra; let the major texts of the Upaniṣads be listened to; (3) let the sense of the major texts be inquired into; let the view of the Upaniṣads be well adopted; let one retire from bad logic; let logic that is in conformity with scripture be explored; let there be meditation of the form 'I am Brahman'; let day after day pride be eschewed; let the notion of 'I' in the body be given up; let debate with the wise be abandoned; (4) let hunger, as a disease, be treated; let everyday alms be eaten as medicine; let one not beg for delicious food; let there be contentment with what one is destined to obtain; let one bear with cold, heat, etc.; let no futile words be uttered; let the attitude of indifference be cultivated; let favouritism and cruelty to people be discarded; (5) let one remain comfortably in solitude; let the mind be concentrated in what is superior; let the plenary self be easily intuited; let this world be seen as sublated thereby; let past *karma* be allowed to get destroyed; let there be, on the strength of knowledge, no attachment to future actions; let the karma that has begun to

fructify be enjoyed here; and then let one stay as the supreme Brahman-Ātman.

The instructions given by Śaṅkara in this quintad of verses are designed to lead the aspirant from the valley of bondage to the heights of release — in the words of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* —

> from the unreal to the Real,
> from darkness to Light,
> from death to Immortality.

Lecture Three

THE GOAL

Four are said to be the human ends *(puruṣārthas)*: wealth *(artha)*, pleasure *(kāma)*, righteousness or moral goodness *(dharma)*, and release *(mokṣa)*. Of these four ends of human existence, the first two, wealth and pleasure are but instrumental values. Even thus they are valuable only when they are grounded in and foster the third value which is moral goodness *(dharma)*. They must be rooted in the good life and also make the good life possible. But even good life is not an end in itself. It serves as the necessary prelude to the life eternal which, in Indian thought, is known as *mokṣa* or *nirvāṇa*, release from finitude and imperfection. This is the supreme or final human end, the fourth *puruṣārtha*. All the systems of Indian philosophy, except the Cārvāka Materialism, and

all the schools of religion are agreed on this point, viz. that the ultimate goal of man is spiritual freedom, liberation from the cycle of repeated entanglement in the empirical process.

It is the Indian emphasis on *mokṣa* as *summum bonum* that makes the message of Indian culture supremely significant to the modern man. *Mokṣa*, according to the generally accepted view in India, is not a *post mortem* experience to be achieved in another world ; it is the supreme felicity which is the eternal nature of the Self. One need not go elsewhere in search of perfection or happiness. It is right within and can be discovered there if one turned in that direction. To the excessively externalised individuals of today, there could be no better message than a call to inwardness. It is the inner Man that is the universal Man. "Higher than the Self there is nothing whatever", declares the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, "That is the end. That is the final goal."[1]

The Self is of the nature of release. *Ātman* and *mokṣa* are synonyms in Advaita. The Self

[1] *Katha Upaniṣad*, iii, 2 : *puruṣān-na paraṁ kiñcit sā kāṣṭhā sā parā gatih.*

is ever free ; freedom is its very nature. Only this truth is not realized because of nescience. The removal of nescience alone is required for the attainment of release. The same is true about the destruction of saṁsāra which is bondage.

It is true that release is said to be "attained" and bondage "destroyed" when nescience is removed. But the expressions "attainment" and "destruction" should be understood in this context in a figurative sense. There are two kinds of attainment, and two of destruction: attainment of the unattained, and attainment of the already attained; destruction of what has not been destroyed, and destruction of the already destroyed. For the first kind in each, action is necessary ; not for the second variety of attainment and destruction. Let us illustrate. For getting an ornament made of gold, action is essential. It is not enough that one procures the money, which itself involves action ; one must buy gold, and get the ornament made, or go to the smith's shop and buy the jewellery. This is a case of attaining what has not been attained. An instance of the other type is the following. A person

imagines that the gold chain he is wearing round his neck is lost. The chain is right there round his neck ; but he is under a delusion. He sets about searching for the chain. A passer-by, on being appraised of the situation, points out to the deluded person that the chain is there round his neck. The person clutches at the chain, jumps in elation, and cries out saying, "I have got back my precious chain". This is a case of attaining what is already attained The person affected has nothing to do for "getting back" the chain. All that he needs get is the knowledge of the fact that the chain was not lost. Destruction, we said, is of two kinds. For destroying, a real serpent, action such as beating with a stick is required. This is a case of the first kind. For destroying the rope-serpent, any amount of beating will not do ; what is necessary is sufficient light. This is an instance of the second kind of destruction. Now, the "attainment" of release and "destruction" of bondage are in the second of the two senses, which is the figurative sense. Release is eternal, and therefore, it is the ever-attained. On account of nescience it seems to be unattained as it were. At the

dawn of knowledge its eternal nature is revealed. Similarly, bondage is not real, being nescience-caused. At the rise of knowledge, it is removed as it were, being already removed. Thus it will be seen that knowledge, and not action, is the means to the gaining of release and the destruction of bondage.

In his commentary on the *Māṇḍūkya-kārikā* Śaṅkara says :

"The souls are never under the veil of bondage, imposed by nescience; they are ever free from bondage. They are pure by nature, enlightened and liberated from the very beginning; so, they are of the nature of the eternally pure, enlightened and free reality. 'If this be so, why is it said by the teachers who know that they are *liberated?*' It is replied thus : Just as the sun, although ever of the nature of illumination, is said to be *shining*, and just as the hills, although ever devoid of movement, are said to be *standing*, even so here." [1]

Again, in the *Ātmabodha*, he observes :

"The Self, although always attained, is

[1] *Maṇḍūkya-kārikā-bhāṣya*, iv, 98.

unattained, as it were, through nescience; when that (nescience) is destroyed, it becomes manifest, as if attained, like the ornament round one's own neck."[1]

All schools of thought which accept the reality of the Self do admit that birth, death, etc., do not belong to it, that it is immutable and eternal. But quite inconsistently, the pluralistic systems hold that there is a separate self for each body, that it really loses its immutability and perfection in the state of bondage, and that it regains it afresh when it is released. Advaita points out that if finitude really belongs to the self, as heat belongs to fire, then even in the state of release it cannot leave the self. And so, the very concept of self implies that the self is ever free, pure, and perfect, and that the contrary characteristics that constitute bondage are illusorily projected by nescience. And, all that is required to realize the true nature of the Self is the removal of nescience.[2]

In the Indian philosophical schools, *mokṣa* is variously conceived. According to

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[1] *Ātmabodha*, 44.

[2] See Śaṅkara's commentary on the *Bhagavad-gītā*, xiii, 2.

some, it is a negative state of absence of sorrow. According to others, it is a positive experience of unexcellable bliss. To the former group belong the Sāṁkhya and Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika systems, and to the latter the schools of Vedānta. The Sāṁkhya conception of the final goal is that it is the spirit's realization of its complete difference from the prius of evolution, called *prakṛti* in the system. The spirit no longer identifies itself with *prakṛti* and its evolutes; it remains as a witness, alone and uncontaminated. This state is known as *kaivalya*, aloneness. According to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika view, the soul, when it attains freedom *(apavarga)*, is stripped of all qualities, including consciousness. The reason why the state of release is conceived in these views to be a state of absence of sorrow and not a positive experience of happiness seems to be that, since it is not possible to have pleasure without pain, one must get rid of pleasure also in order to be free from pain. The schools of Vedānta, however, regard the state of release as involving not only the utter absence of sorrow but also the realization of plenary happiness or bliss. As to what this happiness consists in,

the various schools differ greatly. It may be the presence of or participation in God, who is the home of all auspicious attributes. Or, it may be the realization of identity with the Absolute, which is of the nature of bliss *(ānanda)*. But in all the schools of Vedānta, by the happiness which is characteristic of release is meant, not pleasure as opposed to pain, but an experience of fullness and peace which transcends both. The term for release which is most frequently used in Buddhist teachings is *nirvāṇa*, which literally means "blowing out" or "becoming cool". Opinion is divided as to what the Buddha meant by *nirvāṇa*, whether he meant a negative state of ceasing to be or the positive experience of bliss. Is *nirvāṇa* "only the sleep eternal in an eternal night," or is it "life eternal?" The classical schools of Buddhism and the critics thereof seem to think that the Buddha meant by *nirvāṇa* "really nothing". Others, especially some Vedāntic interpreters of Buddhism, take *nirvāṇa* to mean "as if nothing" or "nothing, *as it were.*" "It does not mean complete extinction or annihilation," says Radhakrishnan, "but the extinction of the fire of

the passions and the bliss of union with the whole."

Though the schools of Indian thought differ among themselves in their views regarding the content of *mokṣa*, all of them are agreed that *mokṣa* is release from the wheel of life and death, which is termed *saṁsāra*. Like the worms that are hurried from one whirlpool to another in the rapids of a swift current, the souls are tossed from one birth to another and are thus caught in a cycle of repeated births. *Mokṣa*, or release, consists in an ultimate withdrawal from this cycle, in non-return to birth, or phrased differently, it is no-more-death.

Since, according to Advaita, Brahman is the supreme bliss, release which is Brahman-realization is of the nature of unexcellable bliss. In release. "one gets firmly established in the supreme Brahman that is endless, of the nature of unending Heaven, i.e. happiness devoid of misery, the reality that is greater than all. Realizing Brahman that is known through all the Vedānta texts as the Self, one attains that Brahman alone."[1]

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[1] *Kena-upaniṣad-vākya–bhāṣya*, iv, 9.

Some of those who hold that release is only absence of misery argue that apart from this there is nothing like happiness. But their view goes against experience, Happiness and misery are experienced to be different. If the absence of misery is happiness, it can well be that happiness is the absence of misery. It is a universally observed fact that there is in all humans a desire for positive happiness, and not merely for the absence of misery. What is more, there is a quest after more and more happiness. Even animals want happiness; only they do not have the power of discrimination to find out the means that will gain happiness for them. Man has this advantage that he can, if he wants, adopt the means to happiness after learning it from scripture and the sages. And, these tell him that the Self itself is the supreme happiness, the final goal, *mokṣa*.

As release is the eternal nature of the Self, one need not wait for realizing it till death overtakes the physical body. Even while tenanting a body one is released at the onset of knowledge. Such a one is called a *jīvanmukta*, released even while living in the body. This, again, is a precious insight of

Advaita. *Mokṣa* is not an unseen fruit to be gained after death. It is not a *post mortem* experience. It can be realized here and now. A text of the Upaniṣads declares: "One realizes Brahman here." [1] The supreme knowledge arises as dispelling ignorance. And, when this happens, release which is the eternal nature of the Self is realized. The continuance of the body is in no way incompatible with the status of release. What happens when release is gained is a change in perspective. Before release, one took the world of which the body is a part to be real; after gaining Self-knowledge one realizes that the world is an illusory appearance. If the body were real, then release could come only after the destruction of the body. But, since the body is not real, its continued appearance or disappearance is of no consequence.

Karma which is responsible for the repeated embodiment of the soul is three-fold: *sañcita*, the fund of accumulated deeds of the past which will bring about future births; *āgāmī*, the deeds that one does in the present life and will do in future lives—these will be

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[1] *atra brahma samaśnute.*

added on to *sañcita*; and *prārabdha*, that portion of the past deeds which has given rise to the present birth, i.e. the *karma* that has begun to fructify in the form of the present embodiment. Of these three varieties of *karma*, *sañcita* and *āgāmī* do not belong to the man of realization because they get burnt up in the fire of knowledge; and they do not any longer affect him by producing merit *(puṇya)* and demerit *(pāpa)*, both of which are evil in so far as they perpetuate transmigration If it be asked how could the man of realization be absolved from the evil results of *sañcita* and *āgāmī*, we reply: even because he does no longer identify himself with the illusory projections of nescience, beginning with egoity *(ahaṅkāra)* and ending with the physical body. His realization is of the form of the truth: "I did nothing in the past; I do nothing in the present; I shall do nothing in the future. In all the three times I am free from the sense of being an agent of actions. I am Brahman." What others may continue to observe as his actions are not *his* actions; they do not attach themselves to him even as water does not stick to the lotus-leaf. Thus, for the man of Self-Knowledge, there are no

deeds, whether good or bad, nor the consequences thereof. As we have already shown, even meritorious deeds are of the nature of evil, since they too cause embodiment.

There now remains the question about *prārabdhakarma:* why should this too be not destroyed for the man of Self-knowledge? The one who asks this question is the one who bears a body and is yet unreleased; such a one sees the *jīvan-mukta* also to continue living in a body. The answer has to be framed in the language that he can understand: the continuance of the *jīvanumukta's* body for a while longer has to be accounted for. The present body is the result of *prārabdha;* it is only when the fruit of *prārabdha* has been exhausted that the body will fall. But the continuance of the body does not in any way affect the *mukta's* state of wisdom; for he knows that the body is not real, that it is but an illusory appearance. But, then, the continuance of the effect after the cause has ceased to be may be objected to: when nescience, the cause of bondage and embodiment, has been destroyed, how could the body stay on? In answering this objection, several illustrations are given. The potter may

remove the rod from the wheel on which he shapes the pot ; but the wheel continues to rotate till the momentum is spent. Similarly, even though the cause of embodiment, nescience, has been destroyed through knowledge, its effect, i.e. the body, may persist till the *prārabdha* gets exhausted through enjoyment. In a dream a person sees a ferocious tiger ; he is seized with fright and wakes up. Now, the cause of fear has been removed ; yet, the person's body continues to tremble for a time. This is another example. Let us imagine an archer practising archery : he has a number of arrows in his quiver ; one of the arrows he has taken out of the quiver and shot it from his bow at the target ; another he has taken in hand and placed it on the string, ready to be shot. Now, let us suppose that at this stage the archer resolves not to continue the practising of archery ; he may, then, throw away the quiver full of arrows ; he may also cast away the arrow that he has in hand ; but he cannot recall the arrow he has already released from his bow ; that must do its work, and only then it will stop. This illustration may help us in understanding why, while *sañcita* and *āgāmī* are not there for the *jīvan-mukta*,

prārabdha must work itself out and is therefore inescapable. To the question : how to destroy *prārabdha ?* the answer is : by enjoying the merit and demerit occasioned by it. But all this explanation, it should be remembered, is from the standpoint of the unreleased. For the *jīvanmukta*, there is no body at all, and so there is no need either for explaining the continuance of the body.

There is a text of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* which says : " If the *puruṣa* knows the self as 'this am I', then desiring what and for whose desire should he suffer along with the body ? "[1] Here, the reference is to the *jīvan-mukta*. The one who is released while yet living has nothing more to achieve and has no more ends to gain. The satisfaction *(tṛpti)* that is his is without any limit and determination Now that he has realized the supreme Self, all obligations have been fulfilled and all desires have been quenched. Prior to the acquirement of true knowledge man has many duties to be performed and many desires to be satisfied. He works for the pleasures of the world and the happiness of heaven ; and he strives

[1] *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, IV, iv. 12.

for release from his earthly bonds. But when once he attains *Brahman*-knowledge, there is nothing else for him to do. Because he has accomplished his object, reached his journey's end, he contrasts his state of felicity and peace with the miserable condition of those who are struggling, and feels supremely satisfied. The ignorant men who wallow in the misery of the world pursue their desires in the hope of acquiring progeny, etc. But the man who has gained supreme happiness, what more should he desire, and why should he follow the way of the world? Those whose aim is the attainment of heaven tread the path of *karma*. But he who is the self of all the worlds, why and wherefore should he engage himself in rituals and ceremonials? If it be asked whether the *jñānin* cannot indulge in activities for the sake of the welfare of the world, let those who are eligible for it do it by all means. Saviours like Vyāsa and Śaṅkara are entitled to preach to the world. Philosophers like Śaṅkara come to the world with a mission to save it. They are, like huge ships, the carriers of innumerable anguished souls across the sea of *saṁsāra*. But the majority of those who are blessed with

Brahman-knowledge are not eligible for this task. The *jñānin* is devoid of any kind of activity, be it good or bad. Even the activities like eating, drinking, bathing, etc., which are attributed as indispensable to him do not exist before his vision. The ignorant may speak of the *jñānin* that he is not free from activities, but that in no way affects him. The unenlightened look with the eye of ignorance, whereas to the divine vision of the seer there is no action, nor action-bred miseries. For the *jñānin* there is not even the obligation of study and reflection, since study is intended for those who do not know the truth, and reflection for those who are troubled by doubts. Nor has the *jñānin* to meditate, for he is rid of all notions of the contrary like conceit in the body, etc. The cognition 'I am a man', which occasionally he may get is not the result of any present perversity on his part. It is occasioned by the impression of his long practice, and it is not capable of obstructing his intuition. Meditation is not the remedy for the removal of his empirical usage, for empirical usage lapses of its own accord when *prārabdha* perishes. As long as the *karma* lasts, even a thousand meditations

cannot dislodge empirical usage. If those who do not seek release-in-embodiment but who desire relative pleasures practise meditation, let them do so. But the *jñānin* who understands that by his empirical usage there can be no harm to his realization, for what purpose should he meditate? Nor is there *samādhi* for him, since he has discarded already the projections of *māyā*. But *samādhi* and projection are modifications of the mind; and a *jñānin* is one who has freed himself from the modifications of the mind. If it be said that *samādhi* is instrumental to the intuition of *Brahman*, then, for him who possesses already the intuition, of what use is the instrument? He has no obligation whatever, nothing to be apprehended or attained. He is centred in the self, and is supremely satisfied therein.

To the *jñānin* who is a non-agent and a non-enjoyer, there may occur activities which are scripturally enjoined or empirically occasioned; but by them he is in no way affected. His actions are conditioned by *prārabdha*, and he has no hand in them. Or, even though there is nothing for him to be accomplished in this world, he may act in accordance with

scripture in order to save the world. His physical body may worship the deity, bathe in the holy waters, and take to the life of the mendicant. His speech-sense may repeat the Vedic *mantras* or study the system of *Vedānta*. His intellect may meditate on the form of Viṣṇu or become merged in the bliss of *Brahman*. But he does nothing, nor does he cause others to do anything. He is the witness of all things and thoughts without any conceit in the way of the senses and in the functions of his mind.

In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa gives a description of the status of the *jīvanmukta* more than once. The *jīvanmuktas* are those who have gained steady wisdom, those who have transcended the three *guṇas*. They are free from the petty desires that bind the soul. They have neither the sense of agency, nor that of enjoyership, for they have ceased to identify themselves with a single body-mind organism. The extremes of life such as praise and blame, heat and cold, do not trouble them. Their revelry, if revelry it may be called, is in the Self. They do good to society, but without any sense of egoity. Their actions are not born out of constraint; they

are the spontaneous expressions of their innate goodness. The very existence of such persons is a blessing to the world. The goal they have attained is *Brahma-nirvāṇa*, the Freedom that is the Absolute. Having attained this final goal, one is not born again.

In a poetical composition, *Jīvanmuktā-nandalaharī*, attributed to Śaṅkara, there is a vivid account of the sage who has gained perfection. The sage who, after initiation by the *guru*, has overcome the darkness of ignorance, is no longer deluded or allows himself to be deceived by the guiles of the world; he has no *vyāmoha*. He may mix with gay townsfolk or be in a forest alone. He may live in palaces and mansions of the rich or on tops of mountains, banks of rivers, and hermitages. He may be in the company of innocent and happy children, or of those who have become old, careworn, and stricken with fear and sorrow. He may be in the midst of learned scholars, great poets, or keen logicians. In all such situations, the sage remains the same, unperturbed and calm. The relative values of our empirical world have no value for him. The sage has gone beyond all dualities and discords. To outward

appearance he may act in a variety of ways. He may practise meditation, or offer formal worship to the Deity; he may worship the Deity in any form — the Mother-Goddess, Śiva, Viṣṇu, Gaṇapati, or any other; he may recite the names of the Divine, with tears of joy streaming from his eyes; he may bathe in the Ganges or in tanks, smear his body with ashes. But these do not make any difference to him. He may clothe himself or not; he may be dressed in superfine clothes or he may appear in tattered rags. What do these matter to him? The states of experience, waking, dream, and sleep, the three *guṇas*, *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, the orders of life — all these have no value for the sage. He has transcended duality. The notions of 'I' and 'mine', 'they' and 'theirs' have fled from him. There is not even a trace of delusion: the sage is absolutely free, perfect, and pure; his nature is not sullied by the world of plurality. He is a *jīvanmukta*.

There is a detailed account of the *jīvanmukta* in Vidyāraṇya's work, the *Jīvanmukti-viveka*. The *jīvanmukta* is one who renounces through wisdom *(vidvat-sannyāsa)*. Because of

the dawn of wisdom, he has no delusions. The world may appear; but he is not taken in. The pairs of opposites which constitute empirical existence do not affect him. The illumination on his face does not increase when happiness comes or decrease when pain appears. Even in sleep he is awake; for him there is no empirical waking; his knowledge is free from all *vāsanās* (residual impressions). Though responding to feelings such as love, hatred and fear, inwardly he is not affected and remains pure like ether. He has no egoity; his intellect is not tarnished by action or inaction. The world does not hate him; he does not hate the world; he is free from elation, envy, and fear. He is at peace with the host of phenomena that constitute *saṁsāra*; though well-versed in all the arts, he is artless; and though he is endowed with mind, he is without mind. Though engaged in all empirical matters, he remains perfectly cool, even as one would be in matters relating to others; for he is the plenary Self. He is completely satisfied with the ambrosia of wisdom; he has no obligations, and has nothing more to do or to achieve. Such a one is the *jīvanmukta*.

Some critics of Indian thought believe that the Indian pursuit of spirituality is a selfish quest, and that the saint and the sage are concerned with only their own salvation. This criticism, however, is the result of a gross misunderstanding of the Indian ideal of spirituality. Whether from the theistic or from the absolutistic standpoint, the goal is not a selfish gain. God-realization or Self-realization is the state of perfection where there can be no room for even the least trace of selfishness. For the man of wisdom there is not the distinction of 'mine' and 'not-mine'. He regards the whole world as his household.[1] But what is the true help that the world could receive from the *mukta*? "The realization of the Self," declares Ramana Maharshi, "is the greatest help that can be rendered to humanity..... A saint helps the whole of humanity, unknown to the latter."[2] In the *Advaita* tradition there is a view according to which no single individual soul is finally released until all souls are released.

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[1] *ayaṁ nijah paro veti gaṇānā lighu-cetasām,*
udāra-caritānām tu vasudhaiva kutuṁbakam.

[2] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* (Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, 1958), p. 18.

This is known as the doctrine of *sarva-mukti* (release of all). Even otherwise, the charge of selfishness cannot be levelled against the pursuit of *mokṣa* or against the *mukta.* Selfishness and spirituality are poles apart, even as the ego is not the true Self.

In these three lectures I have endeavoured to present the Insights of Advaita in regard to the absolute non-dual Reality, the disciplines that constitute the path to Perfection, and the final goal which is Perfection or *Mokṣa.* The teachings of Advaita stem from the *Veda*, the *Upaniṣads* and the *Bhagavadgītā ;* they were arranged by *Vyāsa* and consolidated by *Śaṅkara ;* innumerable sages and saints have served as witnesses to the grand truth of Advaita. I cannot better conclude these lectures than by citing a passage from one of the discourses delivered in Madras, in 1932, by His Holiness Jagadguru Sri Sankaracharya of Kanchi :

"On the tree that is the Vedā, there are the flowers, the Upanishads. The *Brahma-sūtra* serves as the thread which helps in making a garland out of them, fit to be worn round the neck : *vedāntavākya-kusuma-grathanārthatvāt sūtrāṇām.*

"If the maker of the thread (sūtra) was Vyāsa, the one who made the garland was the Āchārya. Those who wear the garland are we. That garland should adorn our neck.

"What we have conclusively understood, is this: 'The truth is only one; all is of the nature of Īśvara'. On account of past impressions, things appear as different. But all must be made into one. Even what is referred to as 'we' must be dissolved. For that, the appropriate sacred texts should be studied. The means to this are the Veda, the Smṛtis, the Purāṇas, the sight of temples, pūjā, etc. We sacrifice so much for the sake of the objects of the world. We can do anythihg for gaining the bliss that is stable. The royal sage Janaka said 'I have given away the entire Videha kingdom; I have given away myself too.'

videhān dadāmi māṁ chāpi saha dāsyāya."[1]

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[1] T. M. P. Mahadevan, *The Sage of Kanchi,* (1967) pp. 60-61.

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